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DELIVERANCE

E L GRANT WATSON



Fiction (English)

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DELIVERANCE

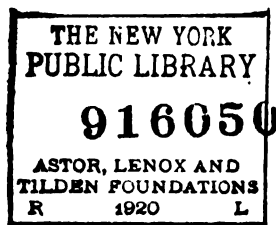
BY E. L. GRANT WATSON

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PREFACE

When I had completed my first book, I had a desire to write a preface, but was so strongly advised to let the book carry its own message that I refrained: with the result that only one reviewer saw what I was driving at. Later when the book was published in America, I was asked by my American publisher to write the preface which at first I had desired to write. Eighty per cent. of the American reviewers were not only sympathetic but intelligent. Having been given the key, they read the book in the mood in which it was written. It seems to me permissible to provide such a key.

In writing this my third book, I have tried to portray a process of spiritual emancipation, of a freedom which is not content to find itself by any premature or artificial way of denial. Emancipation of this kind is difficult enough even for men; and for women, whose lives are, by nature of their biological functions, more closely interwoven in the material process, it is almost impossible. Yet sometimes it is achieved; perhaps most frequently through long or intense suffering. Yet all suffering

P R E F A C E

ultimately entails joy; and so, also, through joy. Such a form of deliverance from the difficult complex of material things is not incompatible with the acceptance of life. Indeed the mistake has too often been made, that through *any* haphazard form of renunciation the spirit could find a short cut to its own freedom. Only through the acceptance of life can be attained a confidence strong enough for that happiness and that deliverance.

In this story I have chosen a woman so sensitive to the beauty of existence as to be conscious, through all her youth and adolescence, of that veiled terror that lurks at the very heart of beauty. Through fear she learns first humility, then courage and at last attains the spiritual power that raises its possessor above accident. And at each step her love for the increasing light of her own spirit grows stronger. It becomes more precious than even the unique love of woman for man. It becomes the arbiter of life, determining with a confidence unshaken by pity or desire the material limitations through which it can best find expression.

GRANT WATSON.

PART I

**“Also sprach zur guten Stunde einst meine
Reinheit; ‘göttlich sollen mir alle Wesen sein.’”**

NIETZSCHE.

**I saw thy face was changed
Yet age went not over thee.
The hazel still is green,
Yet the corn will be yellow soon.**

BARD OF THE DIMBOVITZA.

CHAPTER I

I

OVER fields of shining dew the sun rose, throwing white and yellow rays, which, slanting, made long shadows. Down in the valley mist hung like a fleece of wool; here and there about the hillside clung wisps of shifting vapour. On the side of an open down two small girls, regardless of the heavy dew, were eagerly seeking for mushrooms. Their shoes and stockings were wet through. Over the hillside their tracks were revealed as dark paths across a silver ground, where their feet had brushed the water from the grass. Both children were fair-haired. The elder was twelve; her sister was two years younger. They were quite alone upon the down, which was wide and empty; their little stooping figures shone white in the sunlight like the mushrooms, which gleamed among the grass.

Susan, the elder sister, was tall for her age and slim. Her face was pleasant with the prettiness of youth, but had rather a serious look for so young a child. Her hair, which was very abundant, was yellow like pale honey. It was combed firmly back and

plaited into two pig-tails, which hung down one on each side of her face. She now smiled with pleasure, as she eagerly moved from mushroom to mushroom, plucking them and putting them into her basket. Caroline was shorter and plumper, her hair was darker in colour, though she had the same complexion as her sister and the same blue eyes. Her delight in the mushroom-picking escaped in little giggles of joy as she darted about.

"Look, Susan, what a lot I've picked more than you have." She opened her basket, and smiled up at her sister.

"I don't think those are all good ones," said Susan. "The pale ones are horse-mushrooms."

"But they peel all right. Look, right to the middle."

"Yes, but they don't smell right and they are pale underneath. They aren't so beautiful as the pink ones." She smiled approvingly into her own basket.

"Are they poisonous?" asked Caroline, a little disappointed.

"No, they are not poisonous like toadstools, but I don't think they taste nice."

"Shall I keep them?"

"No, there are plenty of the others; besides, the proper ones are nicer to pick. They have such beautiful soft white frills."

Caroline sorted out the despised horse-mushrooms and dropped them rather regretfully. For a while

they went on picking, till their baskets were nearly full.

In the meanwhile the sunlight rapidly became stronger, the shadows shorter, and the mist, rising in wisps from the valleys, faded away. Farther down on the hillside a group of children emerged out of the cover of a wood. "Look, there's Tom Northover and Richard and Clare and Edgar," said Susan, pointing. "We were first up by a long way."

The girls waited, standing together, while the party approached. "They have got their dogs with them. I expect they are going hunting, though they know that if Farmer Keith catches them he'll be very cross."

As the other children drew near, Tom Northover, a wiry looking lad of fourteen, hailed them. "Hullo, you two girls, you are up early for once."

"We often are," said Susan with dignity.

"I suppose you've taken most of the mushrooms?"

"Yes."

"Let's have a look."

"Oh, they are beauties," said Clare, a dark girl of Susan's own age, but stronger looking and more robust in build. "But we aren't really after mushrooms this morning though we *have* got baskets."

"What are you after?"

"Hares," said Northover, "and if we can't get hares, rabbits — Roy knows what we are after,

don't you, Roy?" he said, addressing his lurcher.

"We brought Towser too," chimed in Clare. "He's no good at running, but he can work the bushes."

"May we come?" asked Susan with diffidence.

"We are going a long way; I don't think you could walk as far — Besides, have you had breakfast?"

"No."

"Oh, well, we have." This remark seemed to be conclusive in its denial.

"They might be useful in that long valley, you know, to keep the hares down," suggested Edgar, a small boy with tight brown curls and bright eyes.

"Very well, you can come if you like," said Tom, "but if we catch anything you are not to tell."

Neither of the girls thought this last remark worth answering. Susan gave Edgar a look of grateful recognition.

"Do you think Aunt Dorothy will mind very much if we don't come back to breakfast?" she asked Caroline.

"I don't know."

For a moment they paused, undecided; then the thought of the morning walk, which seemed too glorious to be missed, decided Susan. "I'll tell her all about it. She won't mind."

At the top of the hill they hid their mushroom baskets in some thick blackberry bushes, then with

the boys started along the ridge of the hills.

Of this party, which they had joined, Tom Northover was leader, both by right of age and knowledge. He was the only son of a retired doctor, who had come to live at East Swaystead some years ago. Tom had grown up in the country and was always much out of doors. He knew more woodcraft than most boys of his age. There was not a bird's note he could not imitate, and by squeaking he could call both mice and weasels. At school he was slow and idle, but in the open he was always a leader amongst other children.

Richard Stanmore and Clare his sister were the children of a country squire. They were both intelligent and healthy; the boy was thirteen, with close-cropped hair, clear brown eyes, very red cheeks, and a rather round chin. Clare had the same bright complexion and a vivacious manner. Edgar, who was only eleven, was the only son of a widow, who had come to Swaystead so as to be near the school. Although he was far less robust than either of the other boys, he was a keen huntsman and was allowed to accompany them on their holiday expeditions.

"We turn off here," said Northover, after they had progressed some distance. They cut across an upland turnip-field, nine parts flints and one part turnips. "Won't Farmer Keith be very angry," said Susan, "if he finds us after his hares?"

"It's market-day today," observed Tom, with a laugh that was like a short grunt. "By this time he's well on the way to Chickworth." After this no one questioned any further.

Abruptly the turnip-field came to an end at the edge of a deep gorge that ran between two downs. At the upper end, where they stood, it was narrow; farther down it widened out, and on each side smooth rollers of green led to a wide and winding glade down the centre. On the opposite bank stunted juniper bushes grew close together.

"The valley winds like the track of some great dragon," said Susan. "It's so lonely, anything might live here."

Tom looked at her with interest slightly kindled. "Yes, there might. I've thought that, when I have been here alone at night. It's fine here when there's a moon and clouds with a wind."

Susan looked at Caroline, wondering whether they too could not come at night and share the scene that she had suddenly pictured.

"Anyway there are usually hares," continued Tom. He then gave his directions. Susan, Caroline, and Edgar were to cross over and take Towser. They were to spread out, and if a hare were started they were to try and keep it in the valley. Himself, with Roy and the other two, would stay on the near side.

Before they had gone far, a hare was put up,

which headed straight down the hill, with Roy not more than a yard behind. He turned sharp into the valley. The dog lost on the curve, then with a quick double back he headed up hill again, gaining now as his pace gathered. The children watched with excitement and mingled feelings. Susan and Caroline, in spite of the thought being traitorous to the cause, rather hoped that the hare would escape. Then, to their bewilderment, they saw it heading straight up the hill towards them. With its ears laid back, it looked like a little bundle of fur, as it fled for its life. They remained spellbound, awed by the hunted look on the hare's face; and the hare, realizing that they were not dangerous, raced past them and away to open ground, with Roy now some twenty paces to the rear.

Richard and Edgar both screamed their disapproval at the girls. Tom merely looked contemptuous and said nothing. Of course they were girls, and couldn't be expected to be any good. Farther down the valley the lurcher was more successful. He started a hare up the hill that was headed back by the boys and caught before it had time to gather speed. For a few seconds it screamed, with the dog's teeth in its back, till Tom ran up and pulled out its neck. The boys were delighted beyond words, and Clare Stanmore laughed in support of her brother. But Susan and Caroline stood with rather scared faces, watching the hare's last spas-

modic moments. Susan realized with sudden repulsion that she had made a mistake in coming. She didn't like killing hares. The delighted shouting of the boys was brutal and horrible. She felt an impulse to cry, but she was too proud to give way. She waited with clenched hands and pursed lips. When the excitement round the dead hare had subsided, and Tom was giving directions for further pursuits, she came to her decision. She walked close up to him and met his eyes unabashed. "I don't like killing things. I'm sorry I helped. I'm going."

For a moment Tom was tempted to make the cheap retort that she needn't trouble, as she had not been of very much assistance, but the quality of her ardour touched his respect. He paused for a moment, and then said: "Everything has got to die, you know, soon or late, and most things are killed."

"I know," she said, "but I don't like it."

He smiled at her serious face. "Dogs are made for killing hares and rabbits and so am I. Hey, Roy!" he shouted, and turned to continue the hunt.

As Susan walked back with Caroline over the down, she felt at first a curious elation. She was glad that she faced Tom Northover. He was a big boy and she was afraid of him, knowing him to be contemptuous of girls, and yet he had spoken to her as an equal and not been scornful. She felt proud. But as she walked on and Caroline talked

about the poor hare, that had such lovely coloured eyes, she began to be depressed. By the time they reached their baskets of mushrooms, she felt that somehow the beautiful spirit of adventure had gone out of the morning.

The dew had almost dried on the grass, but their feet were still very wet. They wondered what their Aunt Dorothy would say to them for having missed breakfast, and, feeling rather sad at heart, the two little girls made their way home.

2

Susan Zalesky spent most of her "free time" walking on the downs or in the woods; sometimes she went with her sister, but often she liked to be by herself. When she had come to England a year before, she had found the country round Swaystead wild and beautiful. She still found it so, but now there had grown up a familiarity which made it more lovable, without in any way lessening its strangeness. Alone in the woods she would feel her own self, supple and unrestrained. She was able to let her thoughts go free and wander. Here she often went over the recollections of her past life. She could remember from earliest youth years of travelling with many train journeys. The life in India with her father and mother was still fresh in her memory.

Her mother, Ida Zalesky, was of English descent,

though she had lived little in England. As a young girl she had gone with her parents to live in Petrograd. Here she had met Paul Zalesky. His brilliance, together with a charming and sensitive manner, had soon made an impression. Besides being wealthy, he was intellectually accomplished, and had already published several plays, and his poems had brought him considerable literary kudos. They had been married, if so wild a creature as Zalesky could ever be described as suffering that restraint, and, since then, had known many vicissitudes. For the first years they had travelled in Europe, living in Vienna, Rome, and Paris. Only for a few weeks had they visited England, then, just before Caroline, their second daughter, was born, they had settled down on Zalesky's estate in Poland. For the latter years they had travelled again. Zalesky's extravagant habits had landed him in financial difficulties, and he had sold much of his property. To meet his losses, he had interested himself in various business concerns in India and Burma. These not proving very successful, he had become disgusted with himself for meddling with the low meannesses of trade. He had felt like a creature of the air suddenly caught and dragged down. Wife and children added to the weight which held him to the recognition of unpalatable facts. At this rather critical time, Madame Zalesky had become ill, and although she had not lost her beauty or the attitude of calm assurance

with which she met the difficulties of her husband's always erratic life, she had become exceptionally pale, and large blue marks had grown under her eyes.

So soon as it was evident that his wife's health was rapidly declining, Paul had become restless; he had always felt a passionate dislike for illness. Then, without even taking the trouble to invent excusing falsehoods, he had vanished. They were, at the time, in a hotel in a large town in Southern India. For some days Madame Zalesky and the two children had stayed on at the hotel; but although she waited in the faint hope that he would return, she early realized that his desertion was deliberate. She had known that he had not been able to tolerate, without difficulty, any kind of sickness; and since she had become unable any longer to conceal her own ill-health, he had been restless and moody. When at this crisis money troubles had come upon him, he had suddenly closed his mind to her, had kept her anxiety at a distance with polite commonplaces, and had denied to her with all the strength of his clouded personality any communion with his thoughts. There had been something about his manner on the last occasion when she had seen him, which, even at the time, had seemed more offhand and easily genial than usual; and when, later, the thought of his desertion sprang to life in her mind, it had at once become a conviction. Yet for a week longer she had

stayed on. Other visitors at the hotel had, during this time, made the usual friendly attempts at conversation, but Madame Zalesky, as if fearing that the painfulness of her situation might be discovered, had remained always reticent. After ten anxious days of waiting, and when her hope had become quite extinct, she had driven to a Dak-bungalow which lay about two miles outside the town. Her reason for the move was simple; she knew of no place where life could be more cheaply supported, and she had not enough money to afford to stay any longer at the hotel.

Susan could remember all the details of the small wayside bungalow where her mother had died. It stood by the side of a long white road running in either direction across plains, covered with sunbaked grass and herbage. Clumps of aloes with their thick and spiky leaves were the most noticeable form of vegetation. They seemed to be the only plant capable of growing with any purpose on the light soil. Along the road passed continuously the native bullock-carts, stirring clouds of dust as they went. There also passed a continuous stream of foot-travellers, some with burdens, others pushing small carts, all with some portion of bright-coloured cloth about them. Over the landscape on each side of the road were scattered the typical, squat native-houses of Southern India. Susan remembered how surprised the coolies were when the cart drew up in the small

yard in front of the bungalow steps. For a long while the bungalow had been little used by white travellers, who, finding it so near the town, had always hurried on to their destination rather than break the journey. For this reason it was little visited, and the coolies in attendance wondered why it had been placed where so few people were likely to need its shelter.

The first days at the bungalow had seemed a relief after the crowded hotel. Susan, who was eleven years old, had been aware of her mother's sensitiveness of feeling. She was at the age when first-love comes with a passionate and revealing power. She felt, with an intensity that was painful, the personal value of her mother's life and character. This first consciousness of devotion found her mother's love already folding her in its soft embrace. There grew between them a close and silent sympathy. The child could understand her mother's feelings without needing to hear them expressed through the rough medium of speech. Susan, although she did not realize the complications that might follow upon her father's desertion, at once felt the blank loss that it revealed in her mother's life. She felt the wound, although it did not directly fall upon herself. Sometimes she wished that her mother would speak to her rather than suffer so dumbly; yet she was afraid lest she should speak. Speech would reveal so much of the torn substance of life. It would somehow be

a violation of their intimacy. By silence and the occasional touch of hands her sympathy could best be expressed.

According they never made direct allusion to their change in circumstances. Their talk was of the ordinary scenes of life, apparently serene and untroubled. Only once had she broken the silence. That was on the night when they first slept in the Dak-bungalow. She lay very still, thinking her mother and sister were asleep. Then, in the silence, she heard a sound which made her heart beat fast with fear and love. Her mother was sobbing softly to herself. For a while she lay still, overpowered in the presence of her mother's pain; then, when she felt she could no longer bear it, she called out: "Mother dear, why are you crying?" At the silence which followed, and which seemed to swallow up her words, she felt frightened and had not dared to speak again. Her mother made no answer. Her sobs ceased, seeming also to be enveloped and lost in the darkness. The next morning no allusion was made to the episode, but Susan was even more anxious than usual to show her sympathy by small acts of consideration.

Caroline, who was two years younger than her sister, was hardly aware that any change had taken place in her life. Often they had changed their abode, and in her eyes the Dak-bungalow was as secure a place of habitation as any other. Here life

was as varied and amusing as usual. Out of doors there were lizards running in the sunshine, there were butterflies, and on the ground strange, hard, stinging ants, that went into laughable attitudes when poked with a stick. From the verandah it was always interesting to watch the people and carts passing along the road.

Before Madame Zalesky and her children had been at the bungalow for many days, a very depressed, woe-begone young man arrived and took up his residence there. He was silent and made no attempt at conversation, seeming to avoid the children as though he feared that they would question him. Whenever he passed them — and at such close quarters, occasional encounters were unavoidable — he kept his eyes cast down upon the ground. Besides looking very miserable, he had the appearance of being in the habit of drinking too much. Before the first day was out he had had bottles of spirit brought to his room. Through the partitions of the bungalow all his movements were audible. In the evening he settled down to drink steadily. At first he was silent, then for a short while he moved noisily about in his room, and finally flung himself upon his bed and began to weep.

The two children were puzzled and disturbed and looked to their mother for explanation. She, however, gave no answer, seeming to avoid the question in their look. Later, when they had said good night

to each other, they lay still listening to the sobs on the other side of the partition. "He must be dreadfully unhappy," Caroline whispered to her sister. "Yes," said Susan, "but he wouldn't like you to notice."

Till late into the night the weeping continued. It seemed strange that those despairing sounds should come from a full-grown man.

The next day Mr. Pollock (they learned that that was his name) remained as uncommunicative as ever. He looked even more ill and miserable than when he had first arrived. Towards evening they could hear that he was again drinking. The same thing happened as on the previous night. He began to weep in long, regular sobs. Sometimes there would be a short silence; then the ugly, gulping sounds would break out again. There was something shocking and abandoned about his weeping, something that the children felt ought not to have been disclosed. Susan wished that he would stop. She felt that it must hurt her mother to lie there listening to those sounds. She thought that his throat *must* get dry and that he would have no more tears to shed; but still the sobs continued with terrible persistence. She was glad that Caroline had at last fallen asleep, but she knew that her mother was awake. Then, when it was very late and she had almost ceased to think about the man on the other

side of the partition, her mother got softly out of bed and began to put on some clothes.

"Where are you going to, mother?" she whispered.

Madame Zalesky crossed to her daughter's bed. "I am going to talk to him. I can't bear it. A man may either drink or weep, but when he does both—" she gave a little shudder—"it is unendurable. Lie still, Susan, and don't wake Caroline. I shall be back soon."

Susan listened to her mother moving gently away through the dim light. She heard her knock on Mr. Pollock's door. The sobbing ceased abruptly. Again she heard the knock. A man's voice called, "Come in." Her mother opened the door, and then she heard her say in her sure, low-pitched voice, "I want you to come out. We can walk a little along the road." Susan thought how wonderfully sweet and strength-giving her mother's voice sounded.

The young man did not answer for a little, then he said, "All right, I'll come." After he had put on some clothes, Susan heard him walk towards the door. A few words were exchanged on the verandah, steps descended into the courtyard, then silence.

For a long while Susan lay still, waiting. It seemed that her mother was away a terribly long time. At last she heard voices, and again steps on

the verandah. When her mother entered, she whispered to her: "Mother dear, where have you been? I don't like waiting here alone so long."

"We have been walking up and down on the road," Madame Zalesky answered. "I'll tell you in the morning."

"Is he very unhappy?" asked Susan.

"Yes, he is unhappy."

"Mother, let me feel your hand. I'm so glad you are back. Oh, you are cold!" Susan held the hand between her own small ones. "Terribly cold. You're shivering. Let me come and make you warm again."

"Be quiet then, don't wake Caroline," whispered Madame Zalesky.

Susan crept out of bed and soon lay close in her mother's arms. "Oh, mother, you are cold right through," she said.

That night remained in Susan's memory with vivid clearness. A passionate care for her mother had been awakened which had sustained them both until her mother's death. The next morning Madame Zalesky was obviously worse. She often shivered, but her shivering now was the shivering of fever. The children pressed her to stay in bed and she consented. Upon Susan now fell the responsibility of management. With a childish dignity she proved herself capable of meeting the situation.

Later in the day she had questioned her mother about Mr. Pollock and the night walk.

"He is very unhappy," said Madame Zalesky.

"Why?"

"Well, he's never been good for anything very much. He has often lost his position and been out of work for a long time. At last he got another place and seemed to be in a fair way to retrieve his character. He stayed there, he told me, for quite a long time. He was a clerk in an office. Then he was given a holiday. On his holiday he met some of his old friends and stayed away a day too late. When he got back, he found that some one else had been put in his place and that he wasn't wanted."

"Couldn't he persuade them to give him a last chance?" said Susan.

"No, they just told him he wasn't wanted."

"But if they knew how unhappy he was?"

"It wouldn't make any difference."

"But what's going to happen to him?"

"I don't know. I am sorry for him but I can't help; and if I could, I don't think it would be any good; he has been helped, but he can't control himself. Now he just drinks and cries. There are people like that in the world."

"Is there nothing we can do?"

"I don't think so. I went to see if I could help him; but I don't think I can. I have very little

money, and what he wants is not money, but employment and hope: belief in himself."

Susan was silent and meditative. It seemed to her terrible that any one should be beyond being helped. She could not quickly understand the significance of being without hope. Life at that moment seemed much more enveloping than she had ever thought, and more terrible.

Some days later Madame Zalesky had called both the children to her. She told them quite simply that in a comparatively short time she would die. She had written, she said, to her sister Dorothy to come out from England and take care of them. She hoped she would live till her sister came. The children listened without fully understanding, but awed by her manner and vaguely frightened. They both cried at the idea of her leaving them.

"There is nothing to fear in death," she had told them. "It is only a change in condition." Although she spoke to the children, her words were in part to give herself assurance and to support her faith. "To fear Death unduly is always a sign that life has ceased to be beautiful. And life can yet be beautiful in spite of all adversity if you can remember your duty: your duty, which is your love unto yourself." "Mother, I don't understand," Susan had said. But, although at the time this was true, her senses *felt*, with a complete unity, the significance of her mother's life, and the significance

of her death. Susan could feel the beauty of that frail body, which showed no sign of fear. The words remained with her. She often spoke them over to herself, and after her mother's death it seemed as if they contained much of the very essence of her mother's life. They also gave to the emotion of love a deep significance. She had loved her mother. Could she ever love herself like that?

For several days after the talk with her children, Madame Zalesky seemed to keep herself alive by sheer effort of will. She lay very still and white in the narrow bed under the mosquito net and prayed with all her determination that she might remain alive until her sister should come. In the next room the unhappy Mr. Pollock continued to drink and to weep. Madame Zalesky was too weak and the children too frightened to make any protest.

Susan remembered vividly these days of waiting and how at last her Aunt Dorothy had arrived and how the next morning her mother was found dead in her bed, having died during the night; at what hour no one knew. These events made upon Susan a deeper impression than they made upon Caroline, who was two years younger, and often, after they reached England, the picture of the Dak-bungalow and of the scenes there enacted remained vividly with her.

At Swaystead a new life had begun for both the children: a life of freedom beyond their imagina-

tions, walks through woods and over downs, a change indeed from the cramped life in India. Their Aunt Dorothy was very different from their mother, though somewhat like her in appearance and colouring. She was much more typically English; kind, with a rather hard manner. She had a superficial jolliness, and her love of outdoor occupations, together with a natural physical energy, sent her for long rambles with the children across the downs. Having once found their way to the woods and highlands, the two girls went by themselves. There was a small copse which they often visited, lying in a fold of the hills. Here beech trees grew and ash trees, and further up the slope, where the ground was steep, thick undergrowth covered with clematis. Here also a big yew spread its dark branches. On the bare ground under its shelter the children sometimes sat listening to the noises of the wood. There was the rustle of mice and weasels moving in dead leaves, sometimes the cry of a jay, and nearly always the chattering of blue-tits. There were fairies too, that they were shy of speaking of, because they were old enough to know that people didn't as a rule believe in fairies and that the boys would laugh. But Susan, when she was alone, was sure that there were other creatures in the woods besides animals and birds. To herself she called them the people of the trees. She liked to lie on her back close to a beech-stem

looking up into the tracery of leaves. It was then that the tree-people, who peeped stealthily from the angles of the boughs, came to look at her. Often she wished that her mother could be with her to share this peopled solitude. Aunt Dorothy could never have understood, nor could Caroline quite, but her mother would have known all about them.

After being by herself in the wood she liked to climb to the top of the hill. From here, undulations of down could be seen, falling away to southward. Beyond was the glittering line of the Channel. On the hill-top winds from the sea dispelled all the soft fancies of the woods. They carried her free of all memories of the past, leaving no room for anything, but the tingling joy of life.

3

There was no school at East Swaystead, which was but a small village, nestled at the foot of the chalk downs, but in term-time the children went every day to the station at West Swaystead and from there a ten minutes' journey to Burmouth. At Burmouth there was a big school for girls and boys. Most people in the neighbourhood who were sufficiently well off and not too old-fashioned to object to co-education sent their children to Burmouth school. Dorothy Tyler was glad to send her two nieces. She thoroughly believed in their having as good an education as was possible.

The East Swaystead children, of course, came to know each other very well, especially as they were thrown together on the daily railway journey. Susan and Caroline had soon found their places amongst the others. They were considered quite tolerable for foreigners bearing so outlandish a name. The life of school interests came as a great change from the solitary and personal life that they had led with their mother. It was good for both body and mind, and they became younger for its socializing influence. Boys began to interest them as odd creatures, different from themselves.

At the time when Susan first went to school, the younger boys, those from fifteen downwards, spent many of their half-holidays in raids and sham-fights in the woods. On these occasions there was much shouting and flourishing of sticks. The combatants divided themselves into two sides: the "Blues" and the "Greens." The "Blues" were boys who lived near the sea and the "Greens" were from inland. Tom Northover was one of the leaders on the "Green" side. He became famous for his skill in laying ambushes, and for digging pits into which his discomfited foes fell. Susan looked upon him as a hero, remote and distant and rather terrible. Edgar and Richard were his admiring followers. The girls of course, were not allowed within this charmed circle of valorous deeds. They remained on the outskirts, watchful and interested.

But free-time was not all occupied with raiding; there were other interests which the boys held very secret. Susan learnt years afterwards that Tom used to poach salmon in the Burr and would give the fish to Jack Smith in exchange for the use of his gun and leave to go with him at night, when he went poaching in the pheasant preserves.

It was in connection with the salmon poaching that Tom first quarrelled with Richard and Edgar. Every school-day in the middle of the morning there was a half-hour's break. This interval Tom gave to the taming of wild mice. He used to take his biscuits to an ivy-grown bank, then by sitting very still and squeaking he could tempt the mice to come out and eat his biscuits. The first steps of this taming had taken time; but, when once their fear was overcome, the little animals used to feed from his hand and run in and out of his pockets. When the mice were very tame, he took Edgar and Richard to be witnesses of the performance. The two boys were delighted and used to go every break-interval to share their biscuits with the mice. Of course they gave them names; there was Grandfather and Mother Fuzzy-face and a family of cousins and nephews.

This was at the time when Tom was very keen on his salmon fishing. One day, at the end of the summer term, he saw a salmon take a mouse that had slipped off a tuft of grass and had been carried out

into the stream. When he met the other boys, he told them he was going to try baiting with a mouse.

"A wild one of course," said Richard, who was never quite sure of Tom's actions. "Not one of ours."

"Why not one of ours? It's easier to catch."

"But when you have fed it yourself, and it trusts you?"

"Well, why not?"

"It's a rotten thing to do."

Tom didn't say anything, but turned away. He couldn't understand Richard's point of view. Nor was he influenced by it. He took two of the mice for his fishing. When the other boys found out (and he made no concealment of his act) they were furious. They told him what they thought. Tom told them they were damned fools, and for many days they would not speak to one another.

It was during this estrangement that Edgar first became friendly with Susan. They were both of the same age and there was something both flexible and gentle about Edgar, that would naturally appeal to a girl. He was bright and vivacious: a nice boy with a clean complexion and clear eyes. Following the instincts of childish friendship, they asked each other to their respective houses. Edgar was the first of Susan's own particular friends that she had asked to the house. Dorothy Tyler liked him and

told him to come again. After tea they all went into the garden and ate gooseberries.

Susan was not exclusive in her friendships. Caroline was always welcome to any share that she wished to take. Jealousy was far from the nature of either of the sisters.

During the estrangement from Northover, Edgar often went for rambles with the girls and brought Clare and Richard with him. Sometimes the two boys persuaded the girls to join them in rabbit-hunting. Susan acquiesced, though she never liked seeing the rabbits chased. She consoled her conscience by the thought that Towser was far too old and short of breath to catch anything. It was Roy who was the murderer, and he was away with Tom on the hills.

Although the two younger boys were strong enough to show their disapproval of Tom's treachery to the mice, they were not proof against the attraction which the wild quality of him and his recklessness exercised. He was so like a conscienceless animal that he was bound to be attractive — irresistible to other boys, who loved wild things. When they made their first advances, he received them as if nothing had happened. His attitude made them feel that they had made rather a fuss over nothing, and that he had never considered such a trifle worth worrying about. The old relation was easy to slip

back into. It was so obviously more sensible to be friends than to quarrel over nothing. Edgar, although he went willingly back to Tom's leadership, did not forget his new friendship for Susan and Caroline. He talked to them about Tom, saying how wonderful he was, how that he knew all the birds' notes and when they migrated and that he had the best collection of eggs of any boy in the county. One day he suggested that he should bring Tom to tea.

The enthusiasm that succeeded the salmon poaching in Tom Northover's mind was that of collecting skulls. On his walks he had found a fair number of dead birds and animals, and with his catapult he could kill a good many more. Their heads he boiled down till all the flesh and skin came off, and then kept the cleaned skulls carefully labelled in a drawer. He soon had a large and growing collection, including the skulls of several cats. Now Mrs. Tyler had two particularly handsome cats. One was a Persian with a magnificent bushy tail and one a very large Tibetan with no tail at all. They were called "With" and "Without." Tom had cast eyes of envy on the Tibetan "Without." He had, he was sure, an enormous skull. The boy set to work to compass his end. But "Without" proved no easy prey. He was very powerful and cunning. There were several encounters which no one knew anything about except the two principals. One day

"Without" returned home with a gin on one of his fore paws. He had been strong enough to pull out the peg that held the trap. Mrs. Tyler was very angry and told the policeman. After this Tom ceased his campaign, being rather frightened.

When he received the invitation to tea with Mrs. Tyler he forgot all about the two cats. When he entered the room, both animals, giving unusual but characteristically cat-like cries of alarm, ran up the curtains and there remained clinging in trembling agitation.

Tom became very red and stood stupidly twisting his cap.

"My cats seem to know you," remarked Mrs. Tyler coldly.

"Yes, they do," said Tom, smiling at her sarcasm in spite of his confessed awkwardness. Then quickly mastering the situation he moved aside, leaving a passage for the cats to make their escape. With a low but threatening sound he stimulated them to take their opportunity. They did so. When they were out of the room, he closed the door.

"Well, you *are* pretty cool!" said Mrs. Tyler.

Tom stood awkward and dumb, though not very much abashed. Every one thought that he might have come worse out of so trying a situation. He didn't look at Mrs. Tyler; he just looked straight in front of him and stood stolid.

Mrs. Tyler couldn't help being amused. She had

at first felt inclined to turn him out, thus vindicating justice and the outraged honour of her cats. But then he was distinctly interesting! She had not failed to observe his fleeting smile. Besides he had taken the initiative in any turning out that was to be done. She broke the strain of the situation by a move toward the tea-table. Northover at once understood. In two minutes he was talking, if not naturally, at any rate, with a fair effort to reach normal conversation. Mrs. Tyler was watching him with interest. After this episode, however, the two little girls looked upon him with a deep distrust.

CHAPTER II

• I

FOUR years passed by. Once more the autumn had come. At Swaystead, season had followed season with days rich in episodes of country life; but no great events had come to stir the stillness of the village. Tom Northover had left school and was now preparing for college. The other children were much grown. They were changing from children to men and women. The small politics of school life had become important. Each boy and girl was conscious of an individual, and perhaps a deciding, position in that community.

It was now late autumn and the Christmas holidays were approaching. One evening, when Susan and Caroline returned from school, they found their father seated in the drawing-room, talking to Dorothy Tyler. He rose as they entered, bowing in his distinguished and foreign manner. There was no familiarity about his action. He greeted them almost as if they were strangers whom he had the pleasure of meeting for the first time. Susan recognized him at once and blushed deeply. She remembered her mother, dying, deserted and without money, in the Dak-bungalow; and although her

mother had uttered no reproach, Susan had since condemned him with all the passionate, though narrow justice of youth. She did not hold out her hand, but drew back from his greeting.

Paul Zalesky was a man of forty, of medium height and fair-haired. He showed no signs of age. His skin was clear and his eyes bright and blue. Under his thick hair, his forehead was broad and high. His nose was straight and refined. The upper part of his face was that of a thinker and idealist. His mouth was rather too large, and the chin weak. The smile which was seldom absent from his lips seemed to be laughing ironically at the bold promise of his eyes. His appearance was strikingly un-English. He was obviously a dandy, and his clothes, though thread-bare, were neat. "My dear children," he began, speaking in a low pleasant voice, with a slight and rather curious foreign accent, "how beautiful you have grown. You do both your mother and myself justice. Susan, you have a very beautiful complexion. Such a white skin is not to be seen often even in English villages."

Susan, who was just recovering from her first surprise, now blushed more deeply. She was angry, hating his compliments; yet something in her was pleased against her will.

"You see!" he went on. "I was just talking to your Aunt Dorothy. Telling her how much I had travelled, and travelled, and was at last tired. Now

I am come to this charming English village to see something of my family." He was silent for a moment while he looked at Susan, trying to sum up the weight of her character. It was easy to see the distrust in her eyes. But Paul Zalesky knew women well and was not abashed. He turned to Caroline. "Ah! Caroline, you have grown darker since I saw you, so long ago; and you are grown so much bigger. You are darker than your mother and sister, but you will be a beauty too. You wait and see!"

Dorothy Tyler, who had remained seated, watching Paul and the children with keen interest, now spoke quietly but decisively. Her fresh colour was rather heightened by excitement, but she held her emotion very well in control. "Paul, I will now speak to the children, and do you listen." She turned to the two girls, who still stood near the door. "Your father's visit has surprised me as much as it has surprised you. You know when he deserted you and your mother, who was ill and dying in India, he lost all claim upon you. You owe him no duty or obedience. It would have been better for you never to have seen him again, but he has thought otherwise. In coming here he has taken me at a disadvantage; this he very well knows. If I refuse him the house, I cannot prevent him staying in the village. There will be talk — endless talk, perhaps misery. I want to protect you from that."

She paused and looked at Zalesky as if defying him to speak. "Well, we have discussed all this and we have made an agreement. He is to stay here as my guest for two weeks. To your friends and at school, you will say that your father is staying on a short visit before going back to his business. But in the house his position is that of a guest. You need see no more of him than you wish. He has no claim on you. At the end of two weeks he has promised to go. Is that clear?" she questioned him.

"Yes, that is quite clear. I want no patriarchal position. Am I a Jew? No, if I can be my daughters' friend, it is all I hope. More than I deserve. What I have done,"—and he spoke seriously now—"I do not try to defend. You all know it. It was perhaps best even for your mother—what she herself would have wished; but I make no defence. If I may stay and share this English home of yours for two weeks, it will not seem too long, I hope. I shall be happy." There was not a trace of sentimentality in his tone. He spoke with suave good-humour, with a flavour of self-depreciation. "Now perhaps I shall leave you. You children must be hungry for your supper; you can then talk to your Aunt Dorothy. Besides you have been so dumb, while we have both spoken so much." At the door he paused. "When you do speak to me," he smiled, "call me Paul as your mother used."

Susan suddenly felt a strange pity for her father.

He was so homeless without being at all pathetic. Besides he was somehow attractive. They had all been horrid to him, she felt. "You must come back to supper," she said, "we shall expect you — In half an hour."

When he had left the room, Dorothy looked at the two girls and smiled, wondering what might be their thoughts.

"So that's what your father is like. I had never seen him before." Then after a pause she added, "I wonder if I was unnecessarily brutal. It is always difficult to judge the secret motives of another person —"

The first few days after Paul Zalesky's arrival were days of vivid interest for his daughters. In their earlier life neither of them had known their father at all intimately. He had lived apart from them, moving chiefly among his own friends and often being absent for long periods. He had seemed then a remote, very independent and superior being. Now for the first time they noticed him with an objective interest. He was very different from the figure they had since imagined. There was a weakness, a kind of childish inability to take care of himself, which gave him charm. He was different from ordinary people. He seemed to say exactly what came into his head. No doubt, they thought, he was clever, yet they did not accuse him of any plan to win their affections. His whole nature was too

irrelevant for that. Vitality, like an unguarded and irregular stream ran through all his actions and words. Sometimes the flow almost stopped, while he lounged negligently in one of the rooms; then in a sudden little burst, like a stream of water, it flowed through him and fell in a surprising little cascade, sending up sparkling drops, which made the children laugh.

Once only he spoke seriously. He was alone with Susan and spoke of the occasion when he had left her mother in India without means, and with the two children on her hands. "Love is capable of bearing much duplicity," he had said. "But there are times when our actions have to find their own honesty. I had then to leave. There is so much cruelty and pain in life; how can we avoid it — for ourselves or others? I am to blame for so much; that what I then did is perhaps but a trifle against the — well, just the living and breathing of every day — We are capable of so many contradictions — We follow impulses whose ends are beyond our comprehension. I know you must find it hard to forgive me." Susan was puzzled by these thoughts which led outside her experience. She felt that life had become strangely bigger by his confession. Her mother had loved this strange man who had wronged her. He was strange indeed and not like other people. Her own judgment of him became unconsciously less condemning. The world had already

become larger. She felt that for her mother's sake she could almost love him.

On their first half holiday, he asked to go with them on the downs. As they walked through beech woods to the bare slope of the hills, he told amusing stories of Polish folk-lore, and of wild creatures in Poland and other countries. His knowledge of outdoor things was wide but superficial, not as North-over's, deep and savage, like that of some wild animal. Susan, although she grew to like him better every day, felt that he would never understand the fancies of her own imagination; the people who lived amongst the trees. She felt that he was not in touch with the earth, though he knew about the things that moved on it. He was amusing, a delightful companion but somehow irrelevant. What charmed them most was the uncertainty of him. He was not in the least dull, and the children never knew what he would do or say next. Richard and Edgar when they met him were mistrustful of his suavity and his un-English appearance, but they were half won by the easy, generous manner in which he met their suspicion. Clare at once voted him delightful. He had paid her the compliments which naturally presented themselves as being due to her youth and freshness.

With Dorothy Tyler, his progress was not quite so rapid. She had rather a bitter attitude towards men in general; this she extended to Paul Zalesky.

But even with her the determination to be distant was difficult to keep up; Paul was so consistently good-humoured — more than that; he was amusing and considerate. He certainly possessed the art of making himself pleasant. For a woman in Mrs. Tyler's position (she was only thirty and had lived alone for five years), it was undeniably interesting to have a man so well-educated and refined as her brother-in-law staying in the house. She found it refreshing to have some one to talk to, with an intelligence superior to her own. And then Paul was always so charmingly courteous. He paid such deference to her opinions, and seemed to anticipate her wishes. Time went more pleasantly since his arrival. He helped her at her work in the garden, laughing like a pleased child at any mistakes he made.

As his two weeks drew to a close, Mrs. Tyler began to regret their shortness, and at the end of the time no one said any word of his departure. In truth they would all have been sorry for him to go.

The winter holidays passed less eventfully than the two girls had anticipated. Their father accommodated himself with apparent ease to the village life. He was courteous to Mrs. Tyler's friends and even went so far towards justifying his position, as to look for, and find, work in Burmouth. This work was of the slightest, consisting of music lessons on two afternoons in the week. Small as this was,

it sufficed to give him a *raison d'être*, and Mrs. Tyler was glad that his parasitism should not appear to be quite complete. Upon the latter point Paul was not troubled. He took the work not for the money, nor for the sake of appearance, but because he loved music and found the journey to Burmouth a pleasant break in the week's monotony. When the spring term came, he used to meet his daughters at the station and return with them to Swaystead.

Susan was now one of the elder girls at school, at an age when she found the life very interesting. Her lessons appeared to be opening channels which led to new possibilities. She was quick at her work and often regretted that it led her to no practical goal. She envied the boys whose lives seemed to open before them so readily. Tom Northover had left school at the end of the summer term and was now at College. Richard was still at school. He was working for his First M. B. He was going to be a doctor and would soon be leaving. With Edgar she had kept up her old friendship. They were of the same age and worked together. In the science classes, the children used to work in pairs so as to help each other with experiments and apparatus. Edgar and Susan were partners — both serious workers, taking pleasure in doing things well.

For more than a year they had worked in this partnership with boy and girl friendship; then one day change came to them. On a certain half-holiday

there was a natural history expedition to Downover Forest. Some of the children went in a brake, some rode their bicycles. Susan and Edgar rode bicycles. On the way out, everything was as usual, but on the way back something strange and unexpected happened to Edgar. Susan's bicycle was refusing to go properly; there was nothing very unusual in that, and they had stayed behind to put it right. Then as they rode along behind the others, Edgar suddenly felt that she had become different. He saw her in a new light. Everything about her, her clothes, her neat little figure, her rather broad face, her fair hair and blue eyes, had become strangely beautiful and very precious to him. So precious that he hardly dared look at her, but he wanted to be very close to her. When he spoke he blushed, and as she looked at him she blushed also. After that they found conversation difficult. Not the easy matter it had been. But that was nothing. It was joy to Edgar to be near her, to look at her and feel that she was his friend.

When they were back at the school, he left her regretfully. But what could he do? It was natural for her to go indoors. It would be absurd to follow her — on no pretext. That evening he walked about by himself in a state of internal tumult. He finished up by writing a long and typically youthful poem about fir trees swaying their branches in the wind. The next day he read the poem to Susan.

They both thought it quite wonderfully good. The girl thrilled with pleasure, knowing that it was somehow connected with herself and with their ride home together.

In the days that followed there were times of inner tumult for them both. They were vividly conscious of each other. Their old friendship had ceased, and something new and rather uncomfortable had come in its place. It seemed to Susan that Edgar kept close to her in a way that was annoying and provocative of scorn. His mind and senses, when in her presence, seemed almost tiresomely agile. But there was a pleasantness and excitement about this development. It was nice listening to the poems that he was so anxious to read. But then she had a growing fear that he wanted to touch her, and this she rather shrank from. She felt now that she must keep him at a distance, though she regretted their old easy familiarity. For more than a week this tension lasted. Then, one day when they were alone in a class-room together, Edgar took her hand and held it abashed, afraid to look at her. Susan felt the colour mount to her face. A very faint feeling of pleasure and conquest seemed to be drowning in a sea of disapproval. Making her fingers stiff and unsympathetic she drew her hand away. Edgar said nothing, but his breath came in a sigh of disappointment. Susan's feeling of aloofness grew stronger. She felt this element of sentimental-

ism in him oppressive. Neither of them spoke of the incident; she avoided his glance. Yet, as time went on he perceptibly came closer to the emotional side of her life. She knew that he was in love with her. He was a nice boy, she thought. Without knowing why, she shrank from what was sentimental in his youthfulness. She was glad, yet at the same time resentful that he had so little power to move her. For the gentleness of his nature she felt that she sometimes loved him. She was glad too that his personality had not the power to touch the inner stream of her thoughts.

This tentative state of mutual interestedness, and on his part of adoration, continued till the end of the spring term. Susan was particularly glad when the holidays came, for she had been growing afraid that the other boys would notice Edgar's behaviour. She dreaded that anything connected so intimately with herself should become a subject of general conversation. In the holidays she felt freer, more at liberty to be kind to Edgar, able to indulge her wakening spirit of adventure by taking flights with him on some of his romantic imaginings. As time went on, and she became less conscious of many watchful eyes ready to ridicule her, she found an increasing pleasure in the boy's society. Edgar also was different. She noticed that he was less sentimental, and more happy. On the downs and in the beech woods they spent much of their time. Every

day he used to pick for her a bunch of white violets.

At this time Tom Northover was at home for the Spring Vacation, but his old friends saw little of him. Every day, nearly, he rode into Chickworth. It was said that he was paying court to some farm girl. People talked of this escapade and shook their heads. When Susan heard the story, she found herself wondering what he would be like as a lover. Rather frightening she imagined: attractive, but so like an animal. She remembered what power he had over wild things and over dogs and horses. He had once told her how to draw a dog. "No dog," he said, "would ever like me." Two ways he commended in all seriousness to be equally effective: short ways to the heart of a dog. One was to have the frog of a horse's hoof with a drop of aniseed on it in his pocket, and the other was to take a bit of red cheese, and put it under his arm-pit, and walk till he'd sweated well and then offer it. "It would draw any dog in creation," he said. She wondered what sort of a girl it was who had attracted him. Then she thought of Edgar. She couldn't imagine him walking about with a piece of red cheese under his arm-pit. The action didn't somehow fit his romantic and gentle character. She smiled at the very thought. At that time he was reading her Tennyson's "Maud" with a good deal of emphasis on the love poems, an emphasis that, she thought, was rather overdone.

Richard and Clare were also at Swaystead but Susan didn't see much of either of them. Richard was working hard for his exam, and Clare had formed an ardent, though as it proved, short-lived friendship with Caroline. Much of Susan's time naturally fell to Edgar; she certainly was growing to like him very much. Her father also occupied her thoughts. He seemed to be fond of her, to be laughing at her in a hidden and ironical way, and at the same time to avoid her. She had grown to like him chiefly because she felt sorry for him. She wished he would treat her as a friend and not as he now did, as either a schoolgirl or a woman to be complimented. He made it somehow uncomfortable for her to live in the same house with him. She felt that nothing could escape his keen observation. He knew about her relationship with Edgar and smiled ironically at both of them as silly children, though at the same time he disliked Edgar with a dislike that Susan could feel was undisguised jealousy. Once he had made some sneering remark. "Leave my friends alone," she had said with anger. He had laughed but had said nothing further. Later in the day in a way that seemed almost childish in its naïveté, he had tried to make up. Susan felt that she could love him for such occasional glimpses of simplicity.

Susan's meetings with Edgar were now a regular part of her life. She went for fewer solitary walks

and more often to meet the boy who waited for her, blushing and eager. One day when they were sitting on a hill-side covered with miniature plants, and the spring sunshine was warming them with its quickening rays, Edgar again took her hand. This time Susan did not withdraw it, but sat still, not quite sure of her emotions; doubtful. Edgar bent closer to her timidly, and then kissed the round side of her cheek.

"Susan, I love you so," he whispered. She was both pleased and displeased. She did not exactly want this. She wanted something vague and undefined. After a moment, she drew her hand away, "Don't," she said, "not now."

"Susan, I love you; can you not love me?"

She was distressed, feeling the sincerity of his tone. "I like you, like you very much . . . I don't know — I want —"

"What do you want?"

"I want to be alone," broke from her.

"Shall I leave you?"

"Yes."

Edgar stood up. "Thank you, Edgar," she said. "Don't think me ungrateful."

The boy walked away down the hill. "He is nice," thought Susan. "But what is it? What do I want? What do I want?" She plucked at some of the wild violets that grew near her, letting them drop. Then she felt sorry to have broken them for

nothing. "I want to be right away," she whispered to herself. "I don't know . . ."

A little way farther up the hill there was the beech wood and the big yew tree. Susan walked to the little wood, and when she was well hidden among the trees lay down. Above her were the spread of the branches and the tracery of twigs. After a little she began to feel relieved and happy once more. How good it was to be alone. It was pleasant to listen to the light wind in the tree tops, and to look at the wide buds just about to burst into leaf. Yes, she had found what she wanted; to belong to herself. If Edgar could let her be herself, she could love him. As a part of her life he had a place, but not where, she could imagine, he wished to be. She desired no tumult of emotions, but to be left cool and self-possessed. "And love?" she questioned. "Yes, after a long, long time, when she was ready, where nothing trivial could be there to humiliate her pride. Her innate reverence for life made her feel that the romantic quality of Edgar's young emotions would not satisfy her. But she liked him and was sorry for him. There were still things she was not sure about; nothing would be easy; but now she felt less perturbed. The time in the wood had given her tranquillity and renewed her faith. She began to walk toward her home with a feeling of new confidence.

In one of the small lanes leading to Swaystead,

she met her father. He looked bright and cheered by the spring sunshine. He held out his hand to her. She took it without noticing the ironical smile on his lips. "So your companion has left you!" he said. "A lovers' quarrel?"

Susan blushed. She was angry with her father for his question, and annoyed with herself for blushing. "Well, Susan, I do not wonder that he has lost his heart," he continued jokingly. "You are very pretty." There was something in Paul's tone that was new to her. She disliked it and wished she had not given her hand, the more so that he held it in his own very tightly. "Yes, you are very pretty. So pretty that I feel I must kiss you myself." Quickly he bent forward and seizing her other hand kissed her on the lips twice.

Susan sprang back. "Oh!" she gasped, looking at him with eyes full of anger and bruised indignation. "Let me go!"

Paul hesitated for a moment, meeting her glance with difficulty. "You are a silly girl," he said in an abashed voice; "go along."

As soon as her hands were free, Susan turned, feeling she wanted to run so that she might get quickly away from him. She was trembling and felt miserable. All her tranquillity had been broken; her new confidence had fled. When she reached the house she went to her room and locked the door. She was afraid lest either Dorothy or Caroline

might come and talk. Alone in her room she nursed her humiliation. "How? Why was it her father was like that? He was impossible. He was a *bounder*. This in her school-girl phraseology meant everything that was mean and low. How could she try to like him? Then she wondered how it was that her mother had loved him. Had her mother really loved him? Could that have been possible? Her mother—How much she wished her mother were now alive!

In a corner of the room there was a travelling case in which were kept the few things which had been in her mother's possession at her death. There were two dresses carefully folded, a small box with jewellery. There were two brown-paper parcels, the smaller of which was labelled "Letters." The girls had sometimes looked at this parcel, but had never opened it. Now Susan felt an impulse to look and see if there were any record of her father; something by which she might know him.—Yes, she had the right to look. For the sake of her own life she must know, and quickly, all that was possible.

When she undid the covering of brown paper, she found that the letters were all in her father's neat, small handwriting. They were love-letters to her mother. Some written before, some after, his marriage. Susan read them all in the order in which they had been written. As she read she be-

came engrossed in the letters, forgetting herself. Here, written upon these pages of paper was something more wonderful than any of her dreams. Here was the beauty of love and more than love: friendship. There opened out to her a world of knowledge in which these two, with such tender and respectful intimacy, walked side by side. Susan felt, as she read the letters, that there was between them so much variegated material for friendship. Their love was rich with the richness of their lives. Her feeling for Edgar was small and anaemic in comparison. It was the fancy of a child compared with the love of a woman. She was glad that she had not been mistaken. But oh! her father — how different he here appeared! — How wide in knowledge! How true! How beautiful! If such treasures were in his mind and heart, why were they now closed? What he had just done to her, seemed in the light of the letters to be incongruous, impossible.

As she continued to read, she found that the letters covered a period of several years. There were letters written during her mother's pregnancy, and later there was mention of her own birth. She felt very glad that she was born of such parents. By the time she had finished reading, her mood had entirely altered. Her mind was now tranquil, full of reflected happiness. When she had folded the last sheet and laid it down, she sat gazing out of the

window, letting her thoughts grow. In the stillness, she felt the power of her own spirit strong to encompass the hope of such love, such friendship.

A belief fell as a small seed falls into warm soil, that all things were possible through love — but, she must have courage and assurance.

With a smile she put the letters back into the box, unlocked the door and went downstairs. Her father was seated in the drawing-room, negligently turning over the pages of a magazine. Susan went up to him. She found what she wanted to say very difficult. It was so difficult, that she knew that she mustn't wait, but must speak at once.

"What happened just now was stupid, so stupid," she said. "I am sorry . . . I behaved like a fool and you too. It was so out of place. Don't you see?" Then in desperation as if she had not been able to express what she meant. "I want your love and friendship."

Paul's natural colour suddenly left his face and he drew his breath in quickly through his nostrils. Susan saw that he was much moved, and had understood. He spoke with impetuous vehemence, all his being centred in the quick blaze of his thoughts. His accent was particularly pronounced when he was excited. "If I touch you again with my filthy hands or thoughts I will go from here. Listen! I will tell you my life. I am full of failure. So many dif-

ferent people are in me. . . . Ah, Susan," he broke off, speaking with anger, railing at her, "I see you are like your mother. So good that I will have to leave you. Do you understand,—no, of course you do not — what it is to live always with one's self-contempt? It can become almost a solace." Then, strangely contradicting his words, he said: "If I laugh at so many things, it is because if I did not laugh I should cry." Then in a more gentle voice. "You ask for love. Only once have I known love, but often women — women and lust, for me they go together. They are my lure and my curse. I destroy them, and myself, because they are not what I dream. Ah! you cannot know, but I am helpless — nothing can resist. I say only love is able to control lust. Love is sure — has courage. You will not fear me if I tell you much? You must be brave to understand . . . You yourself are safe from me. As safe as the holy mother of God. You will despise me. Oh, yes, and for that contempt you must love me the more."

Susan was bewildered, not always following the quick leaps of his emotion. "Perhaps you wonder why I stay on here?" he continued. "It is because I am lazy and have good manners with women. I flatter Dorothy. Now you despise me?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Susan, puzzled. Then catching at an inspiration and getting back to her

main thought. "While you are here teach me. You know so much. Teach me about books — history — all the life that has been."

"Ah! you learn all that at school," he snapped at her, shy of showing how pleased he was.

"Yes; but not really. We know a little, but not the great things. I want to know things that are in the world, not only in the school-books."

"Susan, it will be great joy," he broke out radiantly, "and you are kind," he said, smiling, "not to listen to me too seriously — Ah! You want history and books. I will read you Gibbon and Herodotus. I will read you Don Quixote and 'The Sentimental Journey.' Then for a change I will read you some of those damned clever Russian fellows. There are some good translations. Then we will read Shakespeare. Not as they do in schools: no stupid analysis, but for the feeling." He glowed with his own enthusiasm and for some time continued to speak of the books they would read. He mentioned poets and novelists, French, English and Russian writers. Susan's colour heightened with pleasure at anticipation of the rich stores of experience that were to be opened. She was very happy in her success, very glad that she had come to her father. She knew without further assurance that the distasteful compliments about her personal appearance would cease. She could believe that they would grow to be friends in no ordinary sense.

2

When on the following day Susan and Edgar met, she felt that she must be definite in her attitude. She certainly did not want love, if love was to mean only kisses and sentiment. Edgar, she thought, was only a boy; she liked him, but she thought him emotional. When at their greeting he took her hand and held it rather long in his own, she would have liked to remonstrate, but found it difficult. She said nothing. She saw that he was so nervous and eager, so unsure of her, that she felt sorry for him. When he asked whether she would kiss him she felt what seemed an unjustifiable annoyance. "Why?" she asked.

"Susan, I care so much for you," he said abashed.

"I want to be friends, but not to kiss, and that sort of thing," she answered, "you make it difficult."

"I'm sorry." He was crestfallen. They both felt awkward, Susan feeling that she wanted a larger space to breathe in, and Edgar conscious of failure. She was sorry for him too.

Their time together seemed unsatisfactory and lacked zest. When they parted he again held her hand. She had not the heart to make a movement of withdrawal. For a moment she turned her eyes toward him, but thinking that he looked stupid, turned them away again. She could hear his sigh

of disappointment, then as before, very tentatively he kissed her cheek. "Good-bye," she said, pulling away her hand.

On their next meeting she told him that she did not wish him again to kiss her. She did not offer her hand. "I don't want kisses," she said. "Be as we used to be." But this was not possible for either of them. What she was asking was; "Be as I have now become," and Edgar was not ready for any such transformation. When they were together they felt the strain of conflicting desires, and, although they both felt regret, they drifted apart. The boy with natural egoism was puzzled, his vanity was wounded. He felt that he was somehow to blame. There was a need that the confidence in himself should be restored. Next term his romanticism found in another girl a nature more easily satisfied. Susan could not for long be much troubled, though she was sorry to think that his feelings were hurt. Her life was now taken up with the excitement of the discovery of new knowledge. With her father she had begun her literary and historical education. She found him an ideal teacher. His enthusiasm was always ready to break forth, he was obviously so pleased at the excuse to read again books he had read in his youth. All that he touched he made shine with life and meaning.

His reading had been so large and his knowledge so general that he could often stop to elaborate, tell-

ing her episodes and facts that led away over new areas of knowledge. He would thus lift for her horizon beyond horizon, each as yet dim and undefined, but becoming clearer as she gazed.

Every evening, they would sit in the room, which had come to be called his study, where he kept his papers and his fishing rods. Sometimes Caroline or Dorothy would come in to listen, but usually they were alone. It was when they were alone that Paul was most at his ease; then he let himself go, reveling in his own memory, commenting liberally, always with humour and vivacity.

These readings continued with occasional lapses. Paul took delight in widening her view. They read many varieties of books, including Greek plays, and as a corollary, criticisms of them by modern authors, some of the dialogues of Plato, English of all periods, chosen rather at random, modern dramatists and poets including Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* (Paul couldn't tolerate his later works), some modern French writers. He drew the line at Maeterlinck. (A damned fellow who writes for women's weaknesses and ought to know better, he called him), but read her Paul Verlaine and André Gide. Then, when they were tired of so much variety, they returned to Payne's "*Arabian Nights*." This daughter of his, he promised himself, should have a wider and more intelligent education than the daughters of other men.

And Paul was happier than he had been for many years. The friendship with Susan became the most stable thing in his life. He sometimes wondered whether it was not more perfect than his first love for his wife. More perfect, yes; it was less complex. But with Paul everything was complex; terribly tangled. He never could read rightly the contradictions of his desires. Susan, as her mother had done before, learnt to understand her father's complex nature. For his idealism she loved him, his quick response to any appeal made to his finer nature. She loved him also for his weaknesses. She felt that though she did not understand them with her mind, she could understand them with her feelings, even though they were opposed to the current of her own aspirations.

It was not long before this friendship was put to the test. It carried them both to a further stage of intimacy, giving to Susan strength and assurance.

CHAPTER III

I

DURING the following spring and summer, Susan and her father became so much interested in the books they were reading that he suggested her leaving school at the end of the term, so that she might be able to give more time to work under his direction. Dorothy was at first inclined to oppose this idea, but since Susan was now seventeen years old and was more interested in the new work than in the school routine, she gave her consent. Caroline was of course to stay on at school. There was no reason why she should leave. The books that her father and Susan read were, for the most part, beyond her appreciation. Besides, Paul, although he was very fond of his younger daughter, did not find in her the same possibilities for intellectual development as he did in Susan. He also felt, that where she was not perplexed by him, her mind would be too easily swayed. She did not possess the same natural resistance and independence that there was in Susan. Susan seldom took for granted the colour in which he flooded all his explanations. She gave him the impression of receiving and storing his comments for future digestion. He was always aware of an intellectual friction

which kept their minds warm and sharp. Sometimes her resistance would bend under the weight of his personality, but her mind possessed resiliency which pleased him more than any of her other qualities.

It was at the end of the summer that Susan first noticed that her father and Dorothy Tyler were changing in their regard for one another. Paul's mind, which, in her work with him, was so lucid and clean cut, became clouded. Some quality which she felt to be both pungent and obscure was rising to the surface of his nature. Not that his outward manner changed. That was as good-tempered and as apparently open as usual. Once before had she been aware of this dark streak in him; on the day when he had kissed her. Her Aunt Dorothy was also changed. She sometimes looked pale and tired. Often she was out with Paul for long walks, and sometimes they stayed out late on the river. One day the idea suddenly came with a shock that Dorothy was in love with her father. At first it seemed impossible, but the more Susan thought about it, the more likely it seemed. She watched Dorothy, though she tried to hide her interest. All that she could discover was that her Aunt was conscious of her observation.

In his relation with herself Paul did not change, and this Susan thought was puzzling. With Dorothy it was different, she had withdrawn into her shell

and was on guard, but Paul was just the same in his careless and pleasant manner. Only occasionally when he looked at Dorothy could Susan discern that strange and almost cruel look on his face.

Of this change in relations that was taking place in the house Susan said nothing to her sister, but one day Caroline surprised her. "Have you noticed how strange Aunt Dorothy has been lately?" she said. "Do you know I think she must be in love with Father."

Susan was shocked to hear her own thoughts put so directly into words and for a moment was silent. "Yes, I think she is. I've noticed it for some time," she said, trying to quell Caroline's excitement by her calmness.

"I suppose since Aunt Dorothy is a widow they may be married," Caroline went on.

Susan winced, she did not like to think of her father as married. Then she thought of the difficulty of the situation for Dorothy, and felt sorry for her.

"What do you think Father thinks of it all?" Caroline went on to question.

"I don't know; but it's not our concern, is it?"

"I think it is rather."

"Yes, but not so much ours as theirs."

"But, Susan, something must happen. I don't see why she shouldn't get married."

Susan was at a loss what to answer. She felt

positive that her father would not marry, whatever might happen.

At this moment Dorothy came out into the garden and joined them. She saw that they had been talking about her. For a few moments she was embarrassed. Then she said, speaking to Susan, "You were just now talking about myself and Paul?"

"Yes."

"Let us sit down," said Dorothy. "I want to talk to you both." They pulled some garden chairs into the shade of a lime tree. "There is something about my life, of which you know nothing, that I wish to tell you," she began, when they were seated. "I have never told you about my marriage. When I came here with you children after my return from India, I let it be supposed that I was a widow. I thought it would be easiest for me, and would cause less discussion. My husband had long since lost touch with me, but he's alive. I don't know where he lives; for a time he was in South Africa, but I daresay now he is back in London."

Both girls were silent in their astonishment.

Mrs. Tyler continued. "I will tell you the story of my marriage. When I was a girl, you know my parents went to Russia for two years and took your mother with them. I was considered too young to go travelling, and was left behind at school. When my father returned, we settled in a small house at

Pangbourne on the river. He had not much money but enough to live on in comfort. Here I grew up, and for several years had a very happy life. When I was twenty-two I met the man who was afterwards my husband. His people were new to the county and very rich. His father was a self-made man. He had three sons. John, my husband, was the eldest. I didn't know at the time, though I came to know later, that he wanted him to marry brilliantly — to marry a title. When I first met my husband I knew nothing of this. He was very popular, a charming and attractive man, most generous with his money.

"But he never let me realize how rich he was to be, he was never extravagant, and treated money as of small importance. I saw a great deal of John Tyler on the river at boating picnics and sometimes at dances. When he told his old father that he wanted to marry me, his father was very angry, because, as I told you, he wanted his eldest son to marry a woman of title. He refused to give his consent and said that if his son married contrary to his wishes he would stop his allowance and cut him out of his will. Until this refusal came, I had never thought about the money. It had seemed a minor consideration. Father and son had quarrels, and there were angry scenes, that I only heard about. Then John swore that he would marry me in spite of everything, and that he was sure that his

father would come round. As I say, I didn't mind about the money; and then I was in love. I felt sure we could do anything. John was certain to get on, he was the sort of man who could never be poor or friendless. He was desperately eager to marry me and very sure that his father would forgive us. We married secretly and went to the south of France to escape the storm. We stayed at Arles, and John wrote letters to his father but received no answers.

"After we had been there a week, one of my husband's cousins arrived. He was a man of middle age and a friend of old Mr. Tyler's and used to stay a great deal at their house. I had seen him once or twice before and I knew he didn't like me. When I saw him come into the hotel, I feared and dreaded him as a messenger of evil. My husband was out when he came, so I had to talk to him. I remember noticing at the time how hard and ugly were the lines of his face. I knew him for an enemy. When John came in, his cousin said that he had a message for him to be delivered in private. My husband answered that he had no secrets from me, and that he wanted me to hear what his father had to say. I remember how Mr. Jameson, that was the man's name, moistened his lips as he looked from one to the other of us. He insisted that the message was private, and John insisted that he wished me to hear it. Then Mr. Jameson got up

and said that he was sorry that his journey had been useless but that his message was a private message and that he would deliver it privately or not at all. At that I left the room, though in my heart of hearts I was afraid.

"They were two hours in there together. All that time I waited. When they had finished, my husband looked tired and pale and Mr. Jameson went off in a hurry to catch the train. The message was this. John was to go back within two days or be disinherited and left without a shilling. His father refused to recognize our marriage, and that because I had not a title. It seems absurd in the telling but it's true, I was only cousin to a baronet, he had even said that! It was a choice between giving up either his wife or his father's money! How I would have gloried in him then if he had told them all to go to perdition. That's what the heroes of our imagination would have done; but John talked of the utter impracticability of breaking with his father and said that we must use common sense and not be romantic. He believed he could talk his father over and at any rate he ought not to throw away that chance. He asked me to stay there at Arles and wait for him, and said he would be back in a week at the latest. He asked me to trust him, and although there was fear in my heart, I believed absolutely that he would come. The next day he left for England, and I have never seen him since.

"Of course it was long before I could believe that he had deserted me. He wrote procrastinating letters and I kept myself blind for as long as I could. At last I had to see; my *mind* understood, but it took a long time to soak through to my *understanding*, and for me to realize that he deserted his wife for money. Perhaps I undervalued money. Those self-made men never do. They and their sons have it in their blood."

Neither of the girls spoke, and Dorothy hurried on with her story as if afraid of receiving sympathy.

"I suppose I was sentimental like most girls. I idealized my husband, and, although there was a contradiction in my reasoning, I refused to believe that he had done anything mean or cowardly. I even pitied him for being so much in the grip of circumstance. I also believed (it was rather a half-conscious hope than a belief) that some day he would come back to me. And then mixed with all this there was something of vindictiveness. I refused to divorce him, although I knew that he wanted to be free."

"That was twelve years ago," said Dorothy after a pause, "and of course neither of us has since married. His father is furious. He thought of course that I would divorce him. Revenge is never worth taking, and now perhaps I have to suffer again for my vindictiveness."

After a pause she looked up. "Well, I am not

going to get a divorce now, it would cause too much talk. You see, my position would be terrible after saying I was a widow. My life seems to have got into such a tangle," she complained. She was silent for a while, then continued: "You know, when your father came, how prejudiced I was against him? In my life I have missed so much . . . and now. . . ." Susan cut her short, she could see, mixed with the pain of confession, the sincerity of love.

"Whatever is right for you, you must do; we will understand," Susan's reading had already given her a view wide enough to clear her of conventional prejudice. "It is not for us," she added, "don't tell us." She took Dorothy's hand as an assurance.

Mrs. Tyler looked her gratitude. "It was you two that I was thinking of," she added rather sentimentally.

"We are all right," said Susan, though in her heart she was perturbed. She shuddered at the thought of the things they had almost spoken of. How glad she was to have escaped.

"Yes," said Caroline, her generosity responding to Susan's assurance. "We are all right." She also took one of Dorothy's hands in her own.

Dorothy smiled her sudden happiness. "Then I am happy," she said.

2

"Pyotr Kihalitah Sashin was very much out of humour; his sister, a young girl, had gone away to

live with Vlassitch, a married man," Paul began to read. Susan stopped him at the very beginning. "Does every one in Russia live with some one else's husband?" she asked. "Oh, read some one else. I'm tired of this man. All his people are so grubby. At least this book is. The other book I liked better; there were some good stories. But read Turgenev, I'm tired of Tchéhov."

"No, listen; this is a good story, very good. Perhaps, later you shall have some Turgenev. Of course he is the better artist. But this is a good story." Paul continued to read and Susan listened rather in the mood to find fault. After a little he came upon this sentence. "Any one who puts the peace of his family before everything has to renounce the life of ideas completely."

"Is that true?" said Susan.

"Yes, of course." Then Paul laughed. "But people often lie to themselves with talk of ideas: especially Russians. Englishmen of course lie from stupidity without ideas. People are always stealing ideas and giving them as reasons."

"Men are," said Susan.

"You are right. Women are not so fond of explaining themselves."

"But do you think it right that people should be free to act like this girl, Zina?"

"I do not know, I do not think about it." Paul

shrugged his shoulders. "There is no right or wrong in such things. They just are. If a man or woman loves, then perhaps they can control their passion; but if not then he will follow his physical nature. Oh, yes, nine people out of ten will talk romantically — persuade themselves into pretty falsehoods. But that is the truth. Love alone can control our physical natures. With regard to other things — well, they just happen. They are inevitable."

"And love?" asked Susan.

"Oh, love is rare. It happens once — perhaps twice . . . No, not twice. It is driven out by dreams, fancies, will-o'-the-wisps — what you like. Ah, yes, desire for knowledge — fancies, fancies. A man who has once loved is so full of his knowledge that he thinks he can create and with no better material than human beings. He sees them as ideas, and so they always fail him. Ah, you do not know the cruelty of the mind towards the flesh. But often there are no ideas at all. It is more simple."

Susan thought with pain of Dorothy matched with a man like this. He would never even see the need of her heart. He would walk over her — use her, and discard her; and all with his polite caressing manner. She longed to be able to speak to him, to make him understand; but she feared that she could never touch him. His egoism was of too long stand-

ing. At that moment she was near feeling the sudden hatred that can spring up between sex and sex. "Go on reading," she said.

Paul finished the story. The last sentences completed the thought that was forming in her mind. "And so the whole of life seemed to him as dark as this water in which the night sky was reflected and water-weeds grew in a tangle. And it seemed to him that nothing could ever set it right."

"That is a good story. The composition is good," was his comment on finishing.

3

While the relation between Paul and Dorothy was developing, Susan deliberately saw less of her father. Her feeling was that she must give all her support to Dorothy. From the first she saw the inequality of the contest, and she did not wish to seem to take up any part of her father's life that Dorothy would naturally wish to possess. Their evening readings became fewer, then for a time ceased. Susan spent this period much by herself. It was painful to watch Dorothy's unequal struggle. In the house there was always a feeling of strain. Susan could feel as it were in the atmosphere of their living rooms the measure of all that the woman wanted and of the little the man would give. It hurt her to see Dorothy's hopes blossom only to wither; and to see the wounds dealt to her pride which she held

up as a shield. It was always too weak a guard, and in the end would drop, worn out and useless. She felt a strong aversion from a power that could thus enslave and humiliate a woman. Her father seemed so entirely to be master, but only because he did not feel, and that was monstrous. The girl began to realize what the power of sex between human beings can mean, and wished that she might withdraw herself far from its reach.

During the autumn, which was golden with sunshine, Susan spent much time in solitary rambles in the woods. She found it a great relief to be out of the house. The trees and the turning leaves were so beautiful that they captured her thoughts, carrying them far away into a happy world remote from the secrecy of the house. She hated to think that they now had something to hide, something which would be considered dishonourable. Out in the woods she could forget this. The beauty of life, and of death as a part of life, was here so eloquent that all personal concerns seemed to be swept aside like dead leaves. The way the individual leaves hung upon the twigs before falling seemed to her very beautiful. There was nothing pathetic about their death; it was spontaneous, happy. She liked to look under the stems of the leaves at next year's buds, swollen with contained life, waiting for the spring. Up on the downs she sometimes felt she would like to sing, but it was against her nature to

shout anything aloud, so she would walk on faster, glad that she too had strong life within her.

As winter came on, the contest of desires within the house became more intense. Dorothy was now less able to hide her growing unhappiness. One day when she was alone with Susan she said: "Why don't you continue your readings with your father? On these long evenings he gets bored."

Susan winced, knowing how much of failure Dorothy's words confessed. "Yes, I should like to read with him, now the evenings are dark," she said, as though she had only been waiting for long evenings to offer an opportunity.

When she spoke to her father, he answered with his ironical smile. "Ah, yes, I should like to read again. Ah, Susan, I have been watching you. It was nice of you to be so considerate. But do you not see that from different people we receive different things? That is where women make so great a mistake. They want everything from one . . . It is never so, never! But women do not understand this unless they are great, like your mother."

Susan was pleased that he should praise her mother. Quite illogically she was prepared to forgive all that she had condemned.

"Yes, people are all so imperfect," Paul continued. "That you will not realize till you are older. We are attracted by various qualities in other people, but what we love is something of our own desire

that seems to move, to live, and often to escape through another person's character. The people we love longest are those who best hide and cherish what we always hope to attain. But that is not all, of course; our desires are so different. How can one person suffice?" He broke off and looked suddenly ugly, as his smile disappeared. "You see how it is with Dorothy? But she is too stupid to understand."

Susan felt angry. "She makes great sacrifices," she said and blushed.

"Ah, do not talk of it. These things are always between two. Besides, all sacrifices that live," he suddenly became excited, "are also triumphs. They need no payment."

Susan was silenced, she felt it was no good talking conventionally. Still, she felt angry. He had no right to be so heartless.

"Well, Susan, let us read. Reading will clear the air of all these clouds. Something objective, for God's sake. I will read you the greatest work of your greatest modern Englishman; then you will see how little power we have over our actions." He took down a fat, green volume. "Say no more, sit still, I will read you 'The Dynasts.' This is history and literature in one."

As Susan listened, her spirit was lifted on the wings of the poet's imagination far above all personal problems, above England, and above Europe,

until looking down upon battle-fields and councils, men appeared as automata who "unwitting why or whence, trace unconsciously as heretofore, eternal artistries in Circumstance."

4

As time passed, the cruder and more painful sensations caused by conflicting desires became less acute, till at last they sunk down into brooding quiescence. Inside the house, the relation between Paul and Dorothy was very like the relation between husband and wife who have long since lost their illusions. To the outside world, of course, they remained separate. People certainly remarked that it was curious that Paul should stay so long, but nothing very definite was said.

For more than a year Susan's education by her father continued. When she was eighteen, she put up her hair, and a few days later Paul remarked that she should soon get out into the world away from the village. He suggested that she should go to College for a short while, as Clare had done, but after a little he seemed to forget the idea and let it drop. Life continued as before.

When it was again winter, a new change came slowly over the household. Both the girls began to feel intolerant towards their father. He was so shamelessly lazy and aimless. "If he were only more self-satisfied," Caroline said, "he'd be down-

right bourgeois." "One can't accuse him of being that, poor dear," said Susan, "but I do wish he'd get something to do." She didn't like criticizing him even to Caroline. She loved him as one loves a wayward child, but she was not old enough or wise enough not to wish to improve him. Fortunately for her friendship with her father no ways of improvement seemed open, so she was content to do nothing. But she could not help feeling irritated at his idleness. She spent now much time with her sister. They drew nearer to one another than ever before.

It was in the winter following Susan's eighteenth birthday that Paul showed signs of restlessness. He was quite conscious of his daughter's criticism and resented it. Also he had grown tired of Dorothy. As a surprise to all, he took up again the work at Burmouth that he had long since dropped. But this, as soon became evident, was not for the sake of the work but for the escape that it offered. He often stayed out late, and sometimes would spend the whole night away from home. When Dorothy first suspected that he was interested in other women, she had burst out in reproaches. Paul shrugged his shoulders and said nothing. He made no attempt to answer any of her charges. When she had gone, Paul sighed and lit a cigarette. He looked at his daughters shyly. "Ah, Dorothy is stupid; I have always said so. Your mother knew that such things are trifles. How are they of any consequence?"

CHAPTER IV

I

THREE years passed. Susan was now twenty-one and Caroline nineteen. The life at Swaystead had during this time continued with no remarkable breaks in its monotony. The relation between Dorothy Tyler and their father, after the first strain of his inconstancies, had become so much the accepted thing that his absences had lost novelty. Whenever Paul was at home, he was a pleasant and often brilliant companion. Dorothy found it difficult to quarrel with him for long. He would return from a week or fortnight's absence shameless and cheerful. In the evening he would sit down at the piano and play. When he played, his whole being seemed to live in the delight of the music he produced, and his listeners were carried away by the childlike ingenuousness of his enthusiasm. But Paul was not always happy; sometimes he was melancholy and depressed. On these occasions he would keep away from the others, though sometimes he would talk to Susan. Once he said to her: "This life wearies me. I forget so much of myself." Then, looking at her very hard, he said: "Tell me, do I really teach you things? These things we read together, do they satisfy your

desire for knowledge? Do you not want to go and live in the towns?" Then, as if prompting her answer. "This girl, Clare, your friend, she is at college, but I think she knows not so much as you."

"I don't know," said Susan. "I'm not sure yet. I may want to go, though I shall never want to leave this country for long. I love it. Besides I think—" She broke off, deciding not to speak.

"Ah, yes, you think you are of use to Dorothy. You are quite right. We all need you here, Susan. I soon understood that. You make it possible for me to stay here. Besides," he added as a corollary to his last remark, "I do not think Dorothy is unhappy. She is happier than she would be without me. Also," he spoke with emphasis slightly touched by annoyance, "I am fond of her; as fond as I can be." He paused for a moment, then followed the quick train of his thoughts. "Susan if you were to go away, or if I were to leave you, I would have nothing left. I would be as when I came. This is selfish, perhaps, but then there are so many kinds of selfishness. I cannot lose you. I tell myself that you have better education for a woman than they give in the schools and colleges. For women education of that sort is not much. I say these things believing them, but the real reason is I do not want to lose you."

"I am happy here," said Susan. "I love the country."

She was indeed content and happy. Life seemed very beautiful as sung and whispered by the passing seasons. She felt that she could never be close enough to the secret heart of nature, where grace and splendour mingled, separated and again mingled. She loved her father, her sister and Dorothy each in a separate way, but she did not love them as she loved herself, or the feeling of contact between herself and all the things that spring from the earth. The sadness and the joy, the unconscious and spontaneous life of all wild things, the reflection of these qualities in herself, the interchange, the kiss of appreciation: this was the real happiness of her heart.

During the last years, Tom and Richard had been at the University. Swaystead had seen little of Tom, though Richard had been home regularly in the vacations. He was now working for his second M.B. He did not come often to the house, having taken an aversion to Paul. He could not think it right that any man should live in idleness at the expense of his wife's sister, and since he was too young to conceal his moral judgments, and since Paul was inclined to poke fun at him, they did not find relationship easy. He did, however, meet the two girls fairly frequently, and to Susan it became evident that he was falling in love with her sister. Susan liked him but didn't think him good enough for Caroline. But that, she recognized, was not for her to decide. He was a nice youth, she thought, a hard

worker and likely to succeed. There was some talk that when he had qualified, he might buy the practice at Swaystead. In the spring he took Caroline for long walks on the downs. They went picking primroses and anemones in the woods.

Northover, since his father's death two years ago, had not been to the village. He had left college in the middle of his third year without taking a degree. It was rumoured that he had gone abroad, but no one knew anything definite. All that was known for certain was that the old doctor's house and furniture had been sold, and that Tom had not taken the trouble to come down to the sale.

Clare was away at college but came down sometimes for the holidays. She was very full of college life and talked a great deal about it to Susan and Caroline. She was inclined to patronize Caroline on account of her youth and simplicity. Towards Susan she had a faint feeling of distrust. Both the girls she thought rather abnormal and foreign. She wished that they would be keener on games, and tried hard to persuade them to play tennis and hockey. She was herself a keen horsewoman, and since Mrs. Tyler could not afford to keep horses, her nieces had little opportunity for riding. Clare came a great deal to Zalesky's house. She liked Paul and his compliments, but she did not conceal her thoroughly English contempt for his idleness. She was pleased to talk and argue with him, not be-

cause she was interested in what she considered his eccentricities, but because he gave her an opportunity of airing her youthful wisdom. Her confidence in herself and in the all-sufficiency of her own little system of philosophy had an irritating effect on Susan.

One morning, early in the summer vacation — it was July and the weather was hot — Clare had come in with a message from Richard. She had been talking to Paul, who was listening with amused toleration to her general opinions upon how life ought to be lived. Susan and Caroline had been listeners, leaving the field clear for their guest. Dorothy had also said little. For some days past Susan had experienced a vague uneasiness. She had been aware of something that divided her from her father's confidence. She felt, rather than definitely suspected, that he was about to do something outrageous and disturbing. As she sat listening to Clare's talk, this feeling became stronger, though Susan could not connect it with anything that Clare had said. She felt that all that was being discussed was irrelevant, and that in his own mind her father was considering other things. She wondered how it was that people could go on talking like that; then she felt she must get away, out of doors, by herself.

Once in the open, she was happier, her feeling against the falseness of the conversation she had been listening to was less definite. . . . Anyway she

was glad to be away; now that she was free she would go up to the hills.

As she climbed Hindon, she sometimes paused to look back at the village. The warm, sweet scent of the downs dispelled her mood of oppression. She passed the beacon on the crest, then came in sight of the woods which spread beyond. Trees here covered one side of the swelling chalk down and spread along the surface of the ridge. They were for the most part beeches grown straight and slender on the thin soil. At the edges of the wood were oak trees, short, sturdy and thickly leaved. Here and there a solitary Scotch fir thrust up its darker head. Viewed from a distance, the whole growth of trees suggested the form of some great dragon that sprawled over the smooth green of the down. It thrust forth limbs that clawed the earth, and its great head peered down upon the broad valley, and seemed to be sniffing at the water of the river, which with clear, swift current meandered through the levels. Its body, swollen and misshapen, disappeared abruptly over the crest of the hill.

Under the trees all was quiet, the ground lay brown and bare between the stems. Here and there were small patches of green, of dwarfed dog's mercury and the leaves and stalks of bluebells with their swollen pods. Overhead thick traceries of leaves kept out the sun's rays; layer above layer, they spread flat on the flat ends of the branches. The

slender stems shot upward to meet the sunlight, each branch affirming in smooth curves hope and joy; confident to greet the seasons, and each year to put forth their delicate green leaves. A cart-track climbed the hill, finding its way between the trees, and then ran straight on the central ridge, until, at the far end, it broke through a fringe of oaks and thence led across the short grass of the down.

Soon after Susan had entered the wood, she was surprised by seeing a party of men and women walking along the path towards her. She could see at once that they were not country folk, and guessed that they were excursionists from London who had found their way thus far into the heart of the country. Their tight, black, uncomfortable clothes showed them as people of the poorer classes. Each had the appearance of being time- and care-worn, they were no ordinary company of holiday-makers but more likely a respectable band of mission-workers taking their yearly holiday. In their hands some of them carried bunches of wild flowers. For the most part they seemed very silent, and those who spoke addressed one another in low tones as if almost bewildered by their change of scenery. They walked deliberately along, as if shy of standing still. Susan stood aside and watched them as they passed. Walking a little behind the main group was an elderly woman in a heavy, black dress. Her arms were full of flowers, late foxgloves, scabious and bracken

fronds. Tears were slowly running down her face. Susan looked at her with a sudden sympathy. The woman looked up, met her gaze and smiled. There was no insolence or curiosity in Susan's direct look. It came spontaneously, a quick expression of wonder and of awakened interest, the knowledge that some one else understood the beauty of the woods. Those tears, she knew, were shed in gratitude. She guessed, of course, that there might have been memories, but memories counted for little. It seemed wonderful that a heart could so suddenly overflow towards the unmistakable beauty and hopefulness of life.

Susan watched the woman disappear round a bend in the track, and then stood listening to the voices that became indistinct in the distance. The quick kindling of sympathy between herself and this stranger had revealed how far apart were the two lives that she led. Her life amongst human beings was one in which she had to shield and protect herself. She had found that from men and women it was always necessary to hide much. Life, she felt, could have no dignity without concealment. She held as an unexpressed conviction that joy was as sacred and private as any sorrow and must be hidden as carefully. Her own life was partly a secret from her own thoughts. Knowledge and analysis would smirch the innocence of its existence. Now unexpectedly she had touched, in a moment of sympathy,

upon the existence of a stranger's life. Possibilities had opened in which she had a glimpse of fear — fear that her own world might be invaded. But what possibilities might not sympathy bring? The thought came as a surprise, that some one else might share with her the treasures of innocence and beauty. Would that be possible through love? She shuddered slightly. People in love disfigured and wounded one another. She had seen that. They wished to possess too much. Love made women forget themselves.

Around her the trees barely rustled their leaves. She looked into the clear spaces amongst the branches. She was glad of their presence. She herself was a tree, and contained just such clear spaces, had branches as strong and graceful and roots that went down into the sweet-smelling earth. A wave of assurance came over her, that she could never lose a world of which she was so much a part.

All sound of the holiday-makers had died away. Susan walked along the track till she came to the border of the wood. Here foxgloves grew thick, and scabious and bedstraw sprang from amongst trailers of blackberry. She followed for a time the edge of the wood which sloped towards the valley, then she struck across the soft grass, down the steep incline. Half way down the hill she rested and looked out across the valley. Between the water-meadows the river wound its way. The fields, in

which the hay had already been cut, were bright green, others, where the grass stood, showed every shade of pink ranging to purple. The river itself, a blue and silver band, was edged with dark-green rushes. Six miles distant, on the other side of the valley, rose uplands of heath, which in the distance looked mauve. She knew that at a nearer view it would show a blaze of purple ling. The hill behind her was warm in the sunlight.

The rays of a midday sun fell from a clear sky, and the sun itself blazed with the cruel splendour of mid-July. Low on the horizon were white, heavy clouds. Susan's eyes rested on them for a moment, then looked away, hurt by the hard smoothness of their outline. Just beneath her, at the foot of the hill, were broken and tumbled hillocks; they were covered with grass, suggesting the forms of clumsy, prone figures that struggled up out of the earth. One might imagine that in the midst of their efforts they had been turned to stone, and the grass had come and covered them in a green winding sheet, smoothing and hiding the sharpness of their joints. It was the time of noon when life is most silent, when even the insects are hushed, when the earth seems to pause on the intake of a great breath, and there is revealed something of the uncertainty of her existence, something too of the forces of cruelty and indifference that govern the very pulse of her life. Susan was awed by the silence. It had suddenly be-

come oppressive. She sat upright listening to the smallest of sounds. A faint breath of wind fanned her cheek, then passed, leaving the air more still than ever. A bumble-bee buzzed faintly in the grass, then crawled laboriously over a leaf. She could hear his hooked feet slipping on the surface. Those sounds were like the breaking of the very heart of silence. In the next few seconds she experienced an unreasoning fear. As by some sudden revelation, she saw her life but a small and feeble thing, supported on an indifferent and even terrible earth. Perhaps once long ago she had guessed that life could be like that. She had forgotten. Now she remembered. She looked furtively round the half-sweep of the horizon; there was nothing but the vast indifference of the sky and fields. In that moment she guessed at the onward movement of forces of cruelty and pain. The bee had ceased to crawl. All was still. As if to steady her in her sudden alarm, she had a clear remembrance of the woman's face wet with tears, and with it, there came an overwhelming desire to be with other human beings. If she could touch and be near other people she might be able to hold off the strange fear that squeezed her heart.

With a sudden crack a gorse pod exploded close to her. She jumped to her feet and stood still, restraining with difficulty her desire to run. Then, keeping her eyes upon the grass, she walked quickly

towards the wood. Away from the glare of the sky and the hard white clouds, she would meet again the long-established friendliness of the trees. But as she entered the cool shade, she knew at once that they too were changed. She saw them as if behind a clear pane of indifference. Her spirit was held off by some impalpable substance. The gay and delicate intimacy expressed by the quiver of the leaves was withdrawn. Now they shivered distant and unfriendly. Here too, she felt the need of contact with human beings. She walked quickly in the direction of the village.

Before she had had time to go far, she experienced the curious sensation which sometimes comes to people who live much in the open, that she was being observed. She stopped, feeling shy of the exposure of her emotion. Against the stem of a tree not more than twenty paces distant was Tom Northover. Susan recognized him at once, though in the three years since she had seen him he was considerably changed. He was now wearing the rough country clothes of a workman. A stained felt hat was set far back on his head. For some seconds neither of them spoke. His eyes met hers, showing a grave amusement together with a critical interest. As she looked at him, her fear subsided, curiosity growing in its place. His eyes were fixed on her to read her feelings. She felt antagonism stirred by her instinct for privacy. With a slight

effort of will, to break the growing awkwardness of his silence, she looked up at the tangle of branches. Her fear had passed as suddenly as it had come. She felt that she was again in the friendly presence of the woods. Half reassured but now embarrassed at what must have seemed her strange behaviour, she looked back at Northover. His look was still on her, and had the same amused, interested expression. When he spoke, his voice sounded strong and familiar.

“What are you frightened of?”

“I don’t know.” She felt an impulse to tell him of her experience. “All of a sudden it was very still: unnaturally and terribly still. Everything was changed. . . .”

“Whereabouts were you?”

“On the hillside. It was quite different from what it had ever been before. I was looking at the broken ground at the base of the hill — suddenly there was something unfriendly; everything . . . even the colours of the grass and the hard white of the clouds. . . .”

He did not answer for a few moments, then stepping towards her and speaking in a quite every-day and friendly manner. “Yes, I know that happens sometimes,” then with a smile that was almost a laugh, “I know the sort of clouds, white and heavy like pieces of sugar.”

Susan was pleased at the tone of easy understanding into which they had dropped. It was as if he had not been away at all, but rather that they had met, remembering the familiarity of their childhood yet conscious of their growth. "That sort of fear doesn't last for long," he went on. "You see things are just as usual. They are all right if you trust them."

Susan looked round at the sunlight flickering upon the pale cylindered stems of the trees. Certainly the hostility had disappeared, they were even friendly, yet some part of her confidence in life had unaccountably disappeared. She felt that she did not want to walk back by herself; besides her interest in Northover was reawakened. She remembered what a strange boy he used to be. How much he was changed! She admired the assurance of his speech and manner.

"Shall I walk a bit of the way with you, as far as the road?" he suggested. "I suppose you didn't know that I'd come back?"

"No."

"Have I changed much?"

"Yes."

"So have you in these four years. I haven't seen you since I went to college."

For a time they walked along the path without speaking. Tom seemed quite content to look around

at the things that they passed, and only occasionally, and then as if part of his general survey, did he glance at Susan.

For Susan the silence was like an active invasion of her thoughts. She was sensitive to the man's bearing. It was as if he had touched with his non-chalant manner the doors of her spirit, and now conscious of his power was heedless of her. She felt round for weapons of defence, and as if it were a natural barrier behind which she could hide herself, there rose the recollection of the people whom she had passed earlier in the afternoon.

"Have you been here long; does any one know you are back?" she began.

"Not long. I've come to settle down for a time."

"We all thought you were abroad. Where do you live, what do you do?"

"I just live here, over yonder." He threw back his head indicating the far side of the hills. "I've lived for a while in towns, now I've come to live in woods," he laughed.

"But *where* do you live?"

"I have a cottage the other side of the hill looking toward the sea."

"Do you live here alone?"

"Yes."

There was another pause during which they walked on in silence.

"Did you see the holiday-makers, townspeople who had come in all their stuffy black clothes? They had their hands full of flowers. They were happy."

"Yes, I saw them." His tone was almost spiteful in its lack of sympathy. "What do they come here for? They don't see anything. People who live too long in towns get blind and dead. If they did see by any chance, they'd die of fright. Did you notice how they kept together, their white faces peering this way and that. They had much better keep away."

Susan did not answer, she felt chilled. What if nature were indeed as hard and unfriendly as it had appeared in her moments of panic. It seemed as if Tom Northover had tried deliberately, brutally, to tear a remembrance from her mind. She clung to it but hid it quickly away.

He went on with a vehemence which suggested that the theme touched him closely. "Most people don't trust themselves, they always are afraid. Not that there is anything degrading in fear, but they are afraid of being afraid. They keep to the towns in packs and never dare to be alone."

Susan spoke hesitatingly, not sure of herself. "Don't you think people reach towards and touch something in nature that helps them? They find beauty."

"Do you mean they find that which satisfies them?" He spoke without any expression of irony, though Susan suspected it.

"Yes," she said, "at any rate something that helps."

"Then they are easily satisfied, because they never see, they never really look. They pretend that they have seen, pretend that they have looked and they talk. I tell you they are afraid."

Susan walked on in silence, then she said simply, "I, too, have been afraid. I am still."

"But that's because you have looked. Every wild thing has been afraid in that way."

The girl asked quickly. "How did you get away?"

"By going further in; one can't get away from things like that."

"Is there no escape?"

"Where would you escape to?"

"Into myself."

"That leads nowhere. Why not go on?"

"I should lose myself."

"Do the trees lose themselves?"

"No." Then almost tearfully she cried, "They *were* my escape."

At this he laughed. "From life there is no escape. You must go further in."

"Then I must find my own way," said Susan.

Tom laughed, pleased that she should rebuke him.

"When did it first happen to you?" she asked.

"When were you frightened?"

"Not so very long ago. Last year as a matter of fact."

By this time they had reached the edge of the wood and the road, a white ribband running between the fields, was in sight.

"Will you find your own way now?" he asked.

"Yes. Thank you."

He leant back against a tree trunk and looked at her calmly. "You will come again?" he questioned.

She hesitated for a moment looking him straight in the eyes. "Yes, of course. Good-bye. Thank you for coming with me."

Half way down the hill, she turned and looked back at the woods. The beech trees raised themselves straight on their smooth stems; between them dark spaces led into the interior of the wood.

2

As Susan walked along the village street, the houses on each side seemed more familiar and friendly than ever before. Not yet had she had time to understand her recent emotions. Her fear had been wonderful and unexpected, and so too had been her meeting with Tom Northover. She was grateful to the familiar objects of the village and to the people whom she passed for being so ordinary and

everyday. The white square front of her aunt's house when she reached it looked friendly and like home. As she entered the cool darkness of the hall, she had a pleasant mental-picture of her own room. She felt a thrill of pleasure at the thought of entering its cool seclusion.

At the foot of the stairs she was checked by her father's voice calling her by name. She turned towards the drawing-room. He met her at the door and seized her hand, leading her into the room. At his first words she knew that he was excited. "Ah, my dear, you are the one person above all others that I want to talk to. Come, sit down . . . There has been a row — Oh, such a row!" He spoke with a kind of pathetic apology, shrugging his shoulders as if such things were entirely outside his control. He looked drolly at her, and laughed.

Susan guessed what was coming. She was partly pleased that her thoughts should be turned from herself, and partly annoyed at the intrusion. Her father's excitement and ingenuous self-interest made him at that moment appear very childish. She felt that he needed some maternal woman to look after him, and instinctively offered herself for that service. What he now wanted was a listener.

After looking at Susan for a few moments, he flung himself back in a chair as if to emphasize his amused despair at the hazards of a perverse universe.

With his highly developed histrionic faculty he enjoyed the playing of a part, and like a good actor often lost himself in his acting. He liked to test his friendship with Susan with every kind of extravagance. He knew that he sometimes pained her but this was all part of the game. It amused him to see how quickly she would recover.

"My dear girl," he began. "English women are impossible. Where from they get their ideas and moral sentiments I cannot think. They know nothing of life; they expect so much. Your aunt — I know we are all much indebted to her — but she makes herself impossible. Such a row and so angry a scene she quite frightened the poor girl. And it was not at all her fault." He smiled and raised his voice. "It was my fault."

Susan like all dignified persons had a natural distaste for scenes, and dreaded domestic disturbances. Without a trace of either amusement or reproach she asked. "Who is she?"

"The little girl Hilda."

Had Paul been noticing, he might have seen just the slightest contraction of pain pass over his daughter's face.

"Oh, but she is such a child, she is only fifteen."

"But children are so delightful." He spoke half mockingly, half as if shrugging his shoulders before the inevitable. "Your Aunt Dorothy should know that it is unwise to have so beautiful a young creature

in the place. She says that the girl is a kitchen girl, and that I degrade myself. I tell you she is superficial. In that girl there is something more precious than all the culture and refinement of the world." He was suddenly serious and seemed to hammer his words out, searching for them. "There is a certain quality of youth, a virginity of outlook that is so precious—" He lifted his hands, his fingers crooked and bent inwards, then let them fall clenched on his knees—"that I must have it."

"But think how young and unprotected she is."

"How can that concern me? Susan, I will tell you something about my life; then perhaps you will better understand. When I was quite a boy, fifteen or sixteen,—no, more than eighteen perhaps,—there was an old woman—fifty and more, and ugly. She was kind to me, so I thought; took much interest in my life. Often she would put her hand on my shoulder, or on my head. She would stroke my hair. I thought nothing of it. One day I was sitting writing in a book. She came and stood by me and put her arm round my neck and pinched my cheek. Then she bent close to me and before I knew what she was going to do she kissed my mouth. In one moment I saw what she was. I was disgusted, horrified, revolted by her. I hated her. I jumped up and pushed her from me with my hands. I saw her as everything that was ugly and vile. For weeks I could not get her out of my mind, out of my

body. Do you understand? I lay awake at night and thought about her and hated her. She had three daughters, one was no more than fourteen, the others were older. Well, . . . Do you understand?"

Susan looked with wide open eyes, the colour gone from her face. She nodded her head but said nothing.

There was a shrinking in the girl's soul, a new fear came as she listened, but she was absorbed, carried away by the interest of what her father said. A fragment of the conversation with Northover came to her. "There is no way of escaping; one must go further in." But fear gripped her, a fear allied to that which had attacked her in the stillness of the summer heat. She felt that it was incongruous that this man should be considered a weakling and a failure; that he should be reduced to accept the food that he ate from her aunt's generosity.

Or was it *not* generosity, only infatuation for such ruthless vitality?

"My dear," he went on, "I tell you these things that you may know me. It sounds monstrous, but I am not a monster. I am sorry that such things happen, but I cannot help them." Then suddenly solicitous for her—"You look tired, you need some food. We will have our lunch alone together. Your aunt will not come down. She has been crying and has exhausted herself. No, do not go for

her, you had much better leave her alone. You know it is no good when she is like this."

"Where is Caroline? Caroline is more able to help her than I can. She is more fond of Caroline."

"She is out with Richard. They have been out all the morning. That young man is a prig. That he dislikes me I could easily forgive, but it annoys me that he should feel himself so very noble for wanting to marry the daughter of such a good-for-nothing as myself."

"Oh, that's not true, he never thinks that. He doesn't like you because you have never taken the least notice of him or done anything to make him like you. You break all the rules that he has been taught to keep. He doesn't like you because he's so thoroughly English and simple. He could never understand you. Of course he looks on you as an idler and thinks you ought to be doing something respectable for your living. But he's not a prig, at least no more than other young men. I like him, he's a little stupid of course, but nice."

Paul leant back comfortably in his chair, the earnestness of his manner had quite disappeared. He had assumed again his half-mocking expression. "Do you think Caroline will marry him?"

"I don't know. If she does, he will be very kind to her." Then, as if an urgent thought found expression against her will, she said: "I don't know,"

why women ever marry men. Is there no escape for them?" With an intensity that was almost angry she demanded, "Why should you use them up, take what you call 'so precious'? Haven't they got their own lives to live, their own dignity to preserve? I think the unhappy women are the better off, they have less things stolen. Those you call old maids are the happiest. They get less smirched, they belong more to themselves."

"I know what you mean. I have seen it all. I tell you —" he was again intense — "I have sometimes cried for them in my soul. They hold their riches so cheap." He laughed and for a moment flung himself back in the chair. "They are not worthy to be old maids." A moment later he jumped to his feet. "Susan, if there were more women like you there would be less men like me. You are the one person I love. I can talk to you and be sure that you understand." He came towards her and offered to take her hand. Without any show of embarrassment she avoided his touch. He turned away abruptly, not pressing her. The next instant he had turned again and went on speaking, "Did I say that they threw their riches away? I sometimes doubt whether they have anything. They promise so much, but when I look into them they are empty. Oh, yes, I know, they give me what they call their love, it is a false imagination of their mind, nothing to do with either of us. It is not what I want. It

frightens me away. What women call love is more false and untrue than the deception of men."

Susan broke in upon him. "Then why can't you leave them alone. This girl, what can she give you? She has nothing in common with you, she is uneducated, has no intelligence."

"She has that innocence of youth." He paused, again hunting his words. "What I have called a virginity of outlook."

"But you can never touch that. That you admit."

"Yes, I *can* touch it. I cannot *capture* it. It dies at once. It is my bad luck that I can only kill it."

For a while they both sat in silence, then Susan spoke, almost as if she were speaking to her own thoughts. "But don't women have their own lives, their own values? Haven't you the imagination to consider them? — Is that impossible?"

"How can I consider them when they do not consider themselves?"

Susan's next question came after a long silence. "What have all the women that you have known asked of you?"

"Trifles all of them, protestations, pleasure, happiness all things that made me tired. The more intelligent have asked for my ideas. Now I am too old to be flattered by that. Your Aunt Dorothy has asked me to help her believe that she is not

an old woman. I am tired of her. And yet I must live." He walked across the room. "Come, my dear, we have been too serious. If one thinks too much one has a bad appetite. It is no good talking; one can never find anything out. Besides, you look tired and hungry. I insist that you have lunch with me. Your aunt will not come down. She will make a fuss, she learns so very slowly from experience. We will not wait for the others, it is already late." He led the way to the door. As Susan rose to follow, the thought suddenly flashed into her brain that perhaps through the experience of fear might one win to light on the other side. She clasped the idea as something dangerous and precious. It was only a thought in embryo, very vague; but perhaps, after all, women might be able to escape.

CHAPTER V

AFTER her adventure upon the down, Susan felt that a new force had come into her life. Her mind could not understand how it was that she had so unexpectedly lost confidence. She felt staggered by the unaccountableness of her own emotion. And yet her panic or at least the possibility of panic did not altogether pass. She was no longer self-sufficient, but was glad of the company of other people. The wild things out of doors, that could endure the loneliness of the hills and the trees, now appeared mysterious in their nakedness, even terrifying. Her own confidence was shaken in such a way that she felt all values of life must be remade. She was helplessly at a loss, and now, when most of all she would have liked to be able to form judgments concerning her father and Dorothy, was unable to do so.

As the days passed and she was still unwilling to venture out by herself, she felt the loss of that strength which in the past she had drawn from the wild things of nature.

Sometimes she thought of Tom Northover, speculating as to what had happened to him during his years of absence. The thought of him was certainly interesting. The man that for half an hour

she had talked to and walked with on the downs seemed a very different person from the rather uncouth, wild boy that she remembered. That she had answered "of course," when he had asked her whether she would come again, seemed unlike herself; yet the memory gave a throb of pleasure. She was amused that she had spoken like that. It seemed to her a part of the odd atmosphere that he had created. She remembered their conversation, and how he had hinted that there was no escape from fear. She felt disinclined to go again to the woods. Their old attraction had disappeared. In her imagination she could picture the soft brown grasses that grew in clumps among purple heather, or the wide sweep of open stretches of grass, intersected by cart tracks; but these things instead of being present realities had become distant. All the confidants of her youth were transformed and unapproachable. For the time she felt content to be close to other people. The other inmates of the house seemed to offer an escape from the discords of her own growth. In time she believed she would gain new courage for personal adventure.

As she looked at the lives of others, she felt distressed that people should so inevitably wound one another. Yet she was grateful for the opportunity of looking away from herself. She wanted to escape, if only for a time, from the emotions by which her own life had been invaded.

The days that followed were days of strain for every one except Paul, who seemed quite careless of the complex of passions that he had stirred. Dorothy Tyler had dismissed the offending Hilda, but that had been small redress to her pride. Inwardly it ate into her heart. She tortured herself with vain questions and imaginings. How was it possible for him to thus insult, and yet accept her hospitality? She would have liked to summon her contempt for the man to free her of her bondage. But contempt has never killed love. It gives it new strength, makes it more terribly holding. Between Dorothy and her nieces no word was spoken. The girls kept up a half-pretence that they knew nothing. When they were alone, they spoke together, wondering, to see a woman in the grip of a passion which paralysed individual will. Sometimes they wondered whether pride would not help her to struggle free, then at other times they guessed that no solution was possible and that such suffering was as inevitable as useless.

Since Susan now had no desire to walk by herself, she would often sit in the garden, sometimes reading, sometimes sewing. One morning she was sitting on the lawn under the shade of a clump of willow-bushes. It was near mid-day, and the air vibrated with summer-heat. Across the path, out in the blazing sun, she could see the white row of bee-hives and the bees thronging about the entrances. All the

morning Caroline had been out on the river. Susan guessed that she had been with Richard. Her father was also out. He made a habit now of rushing off directly after breakfast, and often he would not return till late in the evening. Nothing was said about these absences, but the whole household knew that he spent his time in the cottage in which the dismissed Hilda lived with her father.

For some hours Susan had been by herself. When she saw Dorothy enter the garden and walk in her direction, she was not pleased and would gladly have escaped.

As she crossed the lawn to where Susan was sitting, Dorothy did not speak or give any greeting. She pulled out a chair and arranged it for herself. She did not sit down but stood holding it. Then deliberately and almost fiercely she questioned,

“Do you know where your father is?”

Susan raised her eyes, opening them very wide as was her habit when she was nervous. The elder woman went on, not leaving her time to speak.

“Yes, everybody knows where he is. He is shameless. Do you know he’s been out every day this week, and has hardly spoken to me once. He just comes in to meals, uses me for what I can give, then leaves me.” She paused for a moment.

Susan stretched out a hand of sympathy. She did not know how to find words of consolation. She knew that her father could never be as Dorothy

wished; she could only think that suffering was inevitable, and that there was no remedy. Her aunt saw the outstretched hand, but did not take it. She was bitter in her self-pity. She went on with her complaint. "It is hard on me. I have given up more than any other woman would have done, perhaps more than any woman should; and now he leaves me for any worthless girl who takes his eyes." After a pause she broke off and started on a new thought. "I would not have minded so much if only he had not lied and deceived me. He makes me despise him." Then pathetically she added: "Life is so different from what one imagined."

"Yes, it is hard. But you know he can't really help it. He is made that way, it's because he's unhappy himself that he does such things."

"Why is he unhappy? Haven't I given him everything he asked? It's because he's so selfish that he's unhappy."

"Yes, he's selfish because he expects so much, and gives so little himself."

Mrs. Tyler took the hand that was stretched out to her. She spoke with less bitterness now, but from the full depth of her sadness. "I have given all that I know how. I can't be different from what I am. I have given all I have, and he has never really seen me. I have never really touched his imagination."

Susan smiled, though tears and perplexity were in

her eyes. "He seems destined to be always irresponsible."

"Yes, I know what he is; that's why I love him, but it seems hard that he should trample on us all because we can't teach him to fly."

The girl looked away, and said hurriedly but with conviction as if both ashamed and proud of possible priggishness, "We ought not ever to allow that we are trampled on."

"That's what I thought when I was younger." Dorothy was silent for a few moments, then said, "Do you know I hated the idea of speaking to you; but I'm so glad that I have."

"I'm glad too, though I rather dreaded it. It's curious that one should be so afraid of these things."

"I think it is because, when one talks with most people, things seem so naked and ugly, but with you it's different." She bent to kiss the girl's forehead. "I sometimes believe, Susan, that you are such an one as might escape altogether from humiliation. I hope you may escape."

Before Susan had time to answer, Caroline was seen walking down the garden towards them. She looked very pretty and very happy as she came. Her gay, sunlit figure as she walked between the flower beds, seemed to embody the happy robustness of a smiling earth. No cares had touched her; she was still untroubled, though behind her eyes one might see that thought was stirring. Her happi-

ness was of a kind that is infectious, and the two women smiled and called out greetings to her as she came near.

"Look at her, how absurdly happy she is," said Susan. "My dear, what has happened to you?"

"Oh, nothing," said Caroline, blushing. "You ought both of you to have been on the river. It's such a glorious day. On a day like this one can't help being happy." As she spoke she encountered her aunt's eyes. The girl blushed again, this time at her clumsiness.

For a short while they stayed together on the lawn, then after a few minutes Mrs. Tyler left them and went into the house. She felt happier and more cheerful than when she came out to Susan with all her bitterness pent up within herself.

When the two girls were left alone, Caroline arranged herself comfortably on some cushions. Then for a while they sat in silence. Both of them were a little shy of starting a conversation which they knew might contain much, and might lead far. Susan had known at the first sight of her sister that she had come charged with confidences. She now waited for Caroline to speak. When she did speak, it was a different opening from any that Susan had anticipated.

"Why is it that you never go out now? You sit here all day and seem different from what you used to be. You used to be out all day, more than any

of us; and now you never go beyond the garden."

For a moment Susan did not answer, then she looked up and said with convincing simplicity:

"My being here in the garden makes it less lonely for Aunt Dorothy. I thought she might want to talk to me. Today she did come and talk, so I'm glad I stayed."

"What did she say?" asked Caroline, her eyes intent on her sister's face.

"It helped her just to talk about things, about father and the way he treats her. It's better for her to talk to some one than to go about with all that bitterness held up tight inside. Her mind is so restless that it wears itself out just uselessly. I feel sure she is always asking herself questions that can never be answered, and then forms plans that have neither commencement or purpose." Susan looked straight at her sister but her voice was low and uncertain as she spoke. "It's like seeing some creature die in agonies, and become distorted in its pain. I should like so much to call it back to its own life."

Caroline met the direct gaze. Each of the two girls saw in the other's eyes a reflection of her own wonder and fear, and saw too what held that fear in check. Then seriously, as if what she asked were deliberate and reasonable, Caroline asked, "Why is there all this suffering that grows out of what might be the best in people?"

Susan leant back in her chair, letting the question

pass her by. Then, as if throwing her challenge after it, she said,

"There is something in being able to overcome sorrow. If one loves oneself," and she gave a little shudder, "nothing weakening can touch one."

"How strange of you to say that; I should have thought that to love some one else would make one ever so much stronger."

"If you love, then you make your own self stronger. You put your best hopes into those whom you love."

"Yes, but if they should betray you?"

"They betray themselves, not you. That is the test."

Caroline's eyes shone with excitement. "But don't you understand, people can *lose* themselves in one another. It is that which makes love so wonderful."

"No, that's their mistake. That's wrong. They should never lose themselves."

Caroline rose from her seat, walked to her sister and knelt on the grass at her side. "No, dear, it's you who are wrong, as you will find out." Then feeling for a hand, "Do you know what I came to tell you?"

Susan looked aside. "Yes, I can guess."

"Do you doubt the power of love?"

"I never said that, but one should not give away what never ought to be given. If people once lose,

it, they become such fragments, such half-people, so easily spoilt."

"But, for what one loses, one gains so much more. Giving makes us rich."

• "Yes, but one must *have* enough."

"I don't understand. But, Susan, you must understand me though. Do you know, with any one else I should feel it was monstrous to show how happy I am. But I know that you would never be jealous of me." Then rather inconsequently, she added, "I sometimes believe that like Daphne you would change into a tree rather than let Apollo catch you."

All seriousness left Susan's face, she leant back and laughed, giving a little shiver of delight at the thought. "That would be a glorious escape."

Caroline looked at her sister's laughing face, half amused, half reproachful. "Susan, you are incorrigible. When I come to tell you that I've not 'escaped' as you call it! But then why should I want to escape? Richard would be the first to let me go, if I wished to go."

"Dear, forgive me. Perhaps I am stupid. I admit I am frightened. Dorothy has given too much of herself; more than she should. That's why she is tormented."

"But this is different; far different."

With a surrender of her point, Susan smiled into her sister's eyes. "Yes, I see."

The younger girl took Susan's hand, glad now to speak her confidence. "I knew that you would be glad. Nobody but you will know anything about me. The others will just acquiesce and talk. But you make me even happier by understanding. And Susan, you mustn't for a moment think that you are losing me. I see you now, just as I see everything else, more clearly, more beautifully. I love you now more than ever before. One can love so much more when one is happy than when one is unhappy. You will find we have lost nothing; only gained. Do you know even the things I see, the trees and the rivers and the fields, have a different aspect. I see how really happy they all are."

The words came as a shock. Susan closed her eyes and tightened her grip on her sister's fingers. At that moment the hostile aspect of the wilds flashed vividly before her, and it seemed as if her sister were suddenly ranked on the side of her enemies, as if she had become one of those eager to drive fear in upon her soul. Was not such happiness, such a high pitched note of life a menace and a threat? It was a threat to the veiled heart of her life, to that quality of hidden and evasive beauty that hovers about all perfect things. The next instant she knew that she could put all fear aside and refuse to allow such feelings. She leant forward to kiss her sister. "Nothing could alter my love

for you," she said. "For you only to be happy makes me happy too."

In spite of her words she knew that there was already a thin and yielding, yet impenetrable wall between them, and that she felt more lonely than ever in her life.

CHAPTER VI

I

DURING August no rain fell. Little had fallen in July. The grass turned brown, and the soil cracked beneath the rays of the sun. Vibrating waves of heat shimmered close to the earth, forming as they rose a dim haziness, that clung between the hills. The sun's rays were diffused by the numberless particles of dust, and were reflected flat and definite from all surfaces. The luxuriant growth of oak, chestnut and beech trees, still heavily leaved, was divided into glittering lights and dark shadows. One might imagine that they waited there, the only green things in the midst of the universal drought, conscious that the year's task was accomplished. Their energies had found expansion though; now even they would accept gratefully the long deferred rain, that might give the opportunity to express a more ample achievement of their growth. Unlike the trees, that could afford to wait, the smaller shrubs and bushes withered and turned brown; their leaves cracked and dried upon the stems. The sides of the downs were bare, brown and slippery; only in the water-meadows were shoots of green still to be found. In the flat valleys, lines

of thistles raised on straight stems their purple crowns, and tufts of ragwort shone with a cruel yellow. But though thirsty and parched, the earth showed as yet nothing impatient in its aspect. It was expressive rather of expectation and of sure knowledge of the inevitable turn of the seasons. The active stream of life rested for a while, and was content to rest.

That year the corn in the fields turned early to golden brown, and the root-crops dried up and withered for need of rain. It was a good season for the late hay of the water-meadows. There was likely to be a fair harvest, but the farmers prayed for rain early in August. When at the end of the month no rain had fallen, all the villagers began to feel the strain and tension of the long drought. In that still heat, the surface forces of life seemed now to be turning upon themselves in small circles; they waited, moved restlessly, and grew tired of waiting.

For Susan the long drought was the most trying time that her life had yet known. The withered and dead leaves and the thirsty fields seemed to be an articulate and crying expression of the thirst of her own nature. They too had been touched and killed by some fear-compelling and inexorable malevolence.

All through those long hot weeks Susan never went further than the garden or the little village street. She became pale and sometimes slightly feverish. She was unhappy, was lonely, and believed that she

had lost beyond recall what had been a most precious part of her life.

The old comradeship between herself and Caroline had for the time weakened. Caroline spent most of her time with Richard; and now that this sudden change had come over Susan there grew up an unwilling constraint holding them apart. Caroline was not able to make those confidences which at other times would have found a spontaneous expression. At the same time that this friendship seemed to be failing, there grew up a new and more intimate relation between Dorothy and her elder niece. For Dorothy it was a passionate love, all-enveloping in its tenderness. It had no deep roots and did not spring from understanding, but was the growth of the moment, born perhaps of their mutual consciousness of weakness. She watched with a motherly care over Susan; and, with a perception sprung of her love, she forbore to trouble her with questions.

Paul, who was always awake to every situation, watched this development with a kind of half-cynical amusement. It did not make him like Dorothy any the more. In her he saw it as an expression of that baffling and inevitable femininity that so repelled him. But to Susan it gave a new aspect. It sharply defined her as some one able to accept, make tolerable, and perhaps even beautiful, this soft and extravagant weakness of which he had so much dread. He appreciated the fineness of her nature which en-

abled her with dignity to accept such an offering. At the same time Paul noticed the growing change in her, wondering without much concerning himself what could be its cause. He was too much occupied by his own life and experience to be really concerned for another, but it so happened that his own need of a confidant made him go to Susan with questions. His relation with Hilda had lately become complicated. He was ill at ease, angry with himself. He needed to torture himself and perhaps Susan. By this he might, at any rate, temporarily escape from his prevailing mood of self-contempt.

He found Susan sitting in the same room in which they had had their earlier conversation, when he had first told her of Hilda.

He knew quite well that Susan was there, but came in briskly as if not expecting to find her, and then cried out in astonishment.

"My dear girl, why are you sitting here alone in this hot room without even the blinds down? Do you not find it suffocatingly hot? On the lawn under the trees, it is cooler."

"Yes, it is hot here," said Susan. "But then it is hot in the garden and the branches of the trees are all so blighted and sticky. I hate to sit under them."

She did not want to talk to her father, and rose, anxious to escape.

"My dear, do not rush away now. I so much want to talk to you. You are my last refuge; the

only person in the house who does not smother me with sentimental nonsense. Let me pull down the blinds, then it will be cooler. You are not looking very well. This weather is very trying. The dry, close heat is intolerable; but I think we are near the end of it. Yesterday I was talking to a shepherd, and he said that quite soon there would be a storm, then rain."

"I hope so. Everything wants rain, people as well as plants. Perhaps, even, they want it more."

"Yes, the heat is bad. In this place one can hardly breathe." He then laughed. "And this house is so full of this precious situation I have made that I, for my part, can hardly bear to be in it."

For a moment he paused, while Susan settled herself again in the chair from which she had just risen. Then, when he saw that he could safely claim her whole attention, he dashed into his subject. "Do you remember when we had that conversation here a month ago? You said that girl was young and unprotected. You were wrong! She is an old woman; and a woman is never unprotected except perhaps for moments, and then she is too stupid to see it. It is we men who are unprotected. But I will tell you about her."

Susan looked at him very earnestly, almost entreatingly. "Just now I would rather not hear."

"Forgive me, my dear girl, I am a selfish brute." He rose and walked quickly about the room, then

he turned suddenly on her. "But I must tell you all the same. You can help me. You alone can help me. I need your help."

"Then you must tell me," said Susan, "but not more than you need."

"When I first saw that girl, I thought her very young, as young as her years." He gesticulated, walking up and down. "I was wrong. As I told you she is old in experience. You know what she is like. Get a clear picture of her in your mind; then you may understand. Think of her; her dark hair, her dark brows that arch upwards, her sharp chin that comes forward too much, her red lips and then her eyes big and dark, a tiny bit bulging between the long lashes, and then her bright and fresh complexion. Well, that type just fascinates me. At thirty, I know she will be hideous, but now she is supremely attractive. At first I found her fascinating, she had a queer quality that made her seem quite shameless; so much a thing to be played with, and she was different in this from other women that I had loved. Of course she wanted power over me and always more power, but she puzzled me, she seemed to make no claim. I thought she was quite passive, but in truth she was watchful. I sometimes have held her arms, and she has stood before me as if no part of her body belonged to her. Do not think me extravagant. I find this very difficult to explain — but when I loosed my hold she has let

them drop as if she had lost all interest in their existence. Now comes what exasperates me. I found out that for such things as touch she has no senses at all. Then I found that she was amused with me. She stood there looking out of her little minx face critical and amused. The impudence of her eyes said, 'Go on, go on, make yourself ridiculous, go through all your silly masculine tricks. You entertain me. Be naked and absurd. As for me I will not take off one lightest veil from my little vulgar soul.' When I perceived that, my pride was touched. Can you believe it is possible to have that queer illogical sort of pride? After that, for many days I would go and talk to her. I would never so much as touch her hand, but we talked of all manner of things. I wanted then my revenge. Remember, all this time she still wished for power over me. That was my hold on her. As we talked I found opportunities to be cruel, deliberately brutal."

Susan by a movement of her hands stopped for a moment the flow of his words. "But why?" she asked, "how can you behave like that? I find all this hateful, intolerable."

"Hateful!" he spoke with intense excitement. "You speak like a child. There is much in life that is hateful. I am hateful to myself and yet I have to live with myself. Yes, I wanted revenge, also I was attracted in spite of my contempt, because of

my contempt. But this which I tell you now is what hurts me.

"I have spent this three weeks in breaking down every part of that girl's resistance. My life during that time has been lived for one end, and now I have triumphed only to meet bitter humiliation. I talked to her and I talked sometimes at her. I held myself free and distant. All this acted on her desire for conquest and for power —"

At this Susan checked the flow of his words. "I don't want this, I don't want to hear." Then on a note of rising indignation, "You say I can help you! What do you mean?"

His face which had become drawn, suddenly relaxed. "Help me, my dear girl? Yes, by being what you are. Now let me pay you compliments. Any other woman, I mean intelligent woman, would have made sentimental, yes, sentimental, because useless, remarks about the girl; about the state of her soul, and all that damned nonsense. But you — you are angry with me. By that you help me. That you despise me eases me a trifle from my own contempt."

He sat watching her keenly, and again she was silent for a few moments. Then, with understanding and anger, "You inflict all this upon me because you want to humiliate yourself and so believe that you have paid a penalty."

"Ah! you are cruel. You do me good. Yes, yes, that is it. But I swear to you it is necessary for me to go back to that girl. There is something that she has that has escaped me, and which will not let me rest till I have it. Why I told you, you have understood. Besides, I like to see — it gives me pleasure, do you understand — to see you put these things aside." He laughed and spoke lightly. "Another reason for my telling you is that I love you very much. You must not come through life too easily."

She had an impulse to reproach him, but only for a moment. It was blown away by a tender and almost amused compassion for his egoism. He was watching her closely, anxious to guess what she would next say. He delighted in the spark of her courage that still faced him. He did not guess the cruelty of the conflict, that, closely hidden, surged within. She doubted that no answers could be found to the questions that crowded in from all sides. All around her was obscurity. His violent and despairing view of life made poignant her fears. She seemed to float on nothingness, to have lost all supports, and she dreaded lest any least calamity might now sweep her away. All light from the outer world had gone out. There was left only the flickering lamp of her own faith; an illogical hope, that the soul of a man or woman might stand alone, self-respecting and tender, happy in its rich desire to

give, always too proud to make claims upon another. In the hot stifling room, she could find no expression of her faith. She had no words with which to answer her father, no experience wherewith to meet his attack.

For a while, as if fascinated, she gazed at his bright, intelligent features and the keen eyes fixed on her face. As she looked she felt a need to avoid him, and be alone. Not now could she meet such questions. She could not tell whether she would ever be able to meet them; perhaps it was best to let them pass. She knew very well that it was because he loved and respected her above all things that he must always attack her so ruthlessly; but not now could she meet him. If but for a moment she could get again a breath of her past life, the life of the wild things of nature, then perhaps would she be strong enough. Now she was too close to what was painful and suffocating, her instinct was to struggle and hold off. Yet she did not move, but sat wondering how she could get away, hoping that he might leave her. The tone of his voice, when at length he spoke, told her that he had seen something of her unhappiness.

"My dear girl, what is the matter with you?"—then anxiously—"you are looking quite ill."

Still she did not answer. He jumped up, now genuinely concerned. "Ah! what a selfish brute I am. You are ill with this damnable heat. Fool

that I am. Let the girl go to Hell and all that I have told you. What do I care for her? My dear Susan, you are feverish?" He stretched out a hand to her forehead.

She held his hand and thrust it away. "Please, I'm quite all right." Then exasperated, "I can't bear being touched."

He dropped his hand at once. "I'm sorry. Ah! how damnable of me to have worried you. You are looking downright ill."

"I'm all right, but I want to be alone. Please let me go. I don't mind your telling me, but there seems so little use in it." She smiled at him, anxious that he should not make a fuss. "It's so frightfully hot in here, I want to get out into the air."

He was now all solicitous for her, but she knew how to make him respect her wishes and was able to escape. She left him walking furiously up and down the room, like a child angry at himself, and yet more angry at circumstances.

2

When Susan left her father, she went to her own room. At the window she paused, and looked out across the dim landscape that lay shimmering in the afternoon light. The plants in the garden and in the hedges beyond were most of them faded and withered, the grass was bare and brown. With a shiver she turned away and pulled down the blind,

then lay down upon her bed. She felt like one of those garden plants, that she had just seen, limp upon its stem, fading for need of water. With eyes closed she lay still. Presently pictures of her former life raced through her brain. Hope stirred with the thought that those times must return, could not be for ever lost. Fitfully the present distress of her body drove out these hopes, but they came back always with the turn of her thoughts. Her head grew tired with the conflict, then came the clear and mastering idea that on no account must she allow herself to be ill, on no account must she surrender to this feebleness. For hours she lay still, striving by a definite effort of will to rally her strength and be able to master this weakness of body.

At supper time she met the others, and was able to answer her father's questions. She assured him she was now rested, but admitted to finding the heat very trying. Both Caroline and Dorothy noticed that she was not well. They made it easy for her to get away. Later in the evening they each separately came to her door, asking if there was anything that they might do for her. She thanked them, giving assurances that she was all right, only tired, anxious to be alone.

The night was suffocatingly hot, and for a while Susan walked about the room, unable to keep still. She felt that if any one else came to ask about her, she would cry with vexation. She locked the door,

and as she moved, stepped softly lest any one might hear.

At about ten o'clock she looked out into the night, hoping that the air in the garden might be cooler, but it was hot and stifling. She caught the rumble of distant thunder and was glad. She prayed that the storm might come soon to disperse and scatter the tight-gripped force of the drought. She went to her bed and lay down, but had not enough energy to take off her clothes. For a while she lay still, listening to the thunder, which intermittently broke the stillness, becoming louder as the hours crept by. Towards two o'clock she became painfully sensitive to the electric forces in the air. The atmosphere was charged with close-pressed energies, which like those she herself contained, could find no outlet or escape. The thunder, which now more loudly rumbled moved from right to left among the hills to the northward and came slowly nearer. After each flash Susan counted the seconds and could reckon that the storm was ten miles distant. Those intervening miles were slowly covered, and not till four o'clock, when the first twilight showed the outline of the clouds, did the crackling of the thunder follow directly on the lightning. Each flash now lit up clearly every corner of Susan's room. She lay still listening with a kind of half pleasurable pain to the indignant rage of each outburst. The direct bodily fear that touches each human heart in the presence,

of such a gathering of nature's powers was a relief from the troubled questions of her mind. She had vaguely comprehended the inexorable forces of life, and now the direct fear in presence of their awful greatness produced a kind of exaltation. As yet no rain had fallen. The dry air vibrated and broke between the heavy clouds and the heavy drought-stricken earth.

At last the raindrops came. At first one by one, then quicker, one following upon another in a hurried patter. Susan raised herself on her bed and listened. Yes, that was indeed the rain. She sat up, then put her feet on the ground, stood up for a moment and listened. She went to the window and leant out. A heavy drop struck her hand. A moment later a river of lightning streamed down the sky, branching to lesser streams before it entered the earth. By the vivid light she saw the landscape in clear black and white outline, and the grey undersides of the clouds. With the overhead crash of the thunder came the downpour of rain. Straight slanting spears of black water came closely-flung to scatter themselves upon the earth. The girl at the window leant out letting the swift, refreshing water fall upon her face and hair. She was possessed by gladness that the rain had come. This was what she needed. The rain had come at last to refresh the earth, and set free all its pent-up and stifled forces. She felt a new content and a trembling but urgent

desire to be out under the swift stroke of the drops, to be touched and refreshed by the clean water from the sky.

She went to the door, unlocked it and then ran softly down the stairs. A flash of lightning lit up the stairway and the hall. While the thunder was yet rumbling she pulled back the bolt of the front door, and then was in the street.

The light of early dawn disclosed a grey landscape. Already the earth was offering its first thanksgiving to the rain. The sweet and fragrant odour of wet soil rose from all the fields. The shafts of water fell thick on the roadway, broke and rebounded in thousands of small drops, that ran, each a separate and shining sphere, along the ground, then on an instant mingled with the flow of surface water that already swept towards the gutters, where small noisy streams gurgled and laughed. Down from the gutters of the house-roofs, other streams came tumbling to join them. They mingled, talking to one another their soft language, became torrents, brown with sediment, and rushed onward.

For a short time Susan stood motionless under the soft douse of the rain. She drank in at her nostrils the odour of wet earth. Life was once more beautiful. All the joy of life recaptured rose in her heart. Her eyes filled with tears. Her happiness quivered like a new caught bird, and tears alone could speak of its beauty. She once again loved the

earth and all the manifestations of earth's power. At that moment she was willing to accept whatever life might bring. She was free to go back to all that she had believed lost; to go back to the woods, where wet leaves dripped with the rain, and the smooth cylinders of stems and branches glistened in the morning light. She could not contain such joy and remain inactive, but regardless of all but her present happiness hurried along the village street towards the open country of downs and beech woods.

Before Susan had gone far, her clothes were wet through and clung about her. Once outside the village she stopped to pin up her skirt on either side. She then made straight across the fields towards the rise of the down. At the foot of the ascent she paused, turning aside into a small copse of birch and oak saplings. Later perhaps she might climb the hills, but first she wanted to feel herself closely surrounded by the web of branches and twigs, by the arched span of brambles and the upspringing shoots of grass stems.

In a clearing she paused, listening to the rattle of the raindrops. Two silver-birches, one on either hand, rustled their wet leaves. Their stems sprang straight and slender from amidst a tangle of blackberry bramble and rank bracken. The rain in long grey needles descended without pause and without hurry. Looking upward she saw the separate drops like white specks falling towards the earth. The

thunder, gone eastward, rumbled occasionally, and the distant landscape was blotted out, grey in a sheet of water.

Near at hand each leaf tip held its shining drop. The grass under foot was odorous with the sweetness of earth revived. Susan took in with wide-open eyes the new aspect of the woods. Here indeed she had stepped into a new found fairy-land; a fairy-land that had lain hidden just on the other side of fear. She had won to it through fear, by means perhaps of fear. She saw things in what then seemed their real form. They were there, beyond the reach of doubt. They had been calm in their suffering; they were now joyful in their release. She felt light, as light as the leaves that trembled on the birch twigs. She was as glad as they, as wonderfully touched by freedom, understanding their quiet secrets, sharing the emancipation of unsentient things. She stooped, feeling the grass with her hands. Then she stood upright and bent back her head, so that the rain might fall on her upturned face. In a delight of both body and mind she closed her eyes, glad to feel the soft water that fell out of the great spaces of the sky, making wet all her body.

She heard the sudden breaking of twigs and looked down to see what might be the cause. On the other side of the clearing, not twenty paces distant, was Tom Northover. He had been pushing his way through the undergrowth and now checked. Susan

was neither surprised nor embarrassed at his sudden appearance. She accepted him as part of the landscape. It seemed natural that he should be there. Just then she was beyond the touch of any human being. She neither resented, nor was she glad of his presence. He stood looking at her with his usual half quizzing expression of amusement. His brown coat, soaked at the shoulders, hung limp and wet. He wore no hat and from his hair the rain trickled down his face. Their eyes met, hers full of her happiness, his interested and calm. Susan smiled and gave a short laugh. She suddenly knew that she was glad of their meeting. "Of course he had to come out to be in the rain," she thought.

"So you too are out in the rain," he said. "It's strange we should meet like this. It's a long time since you were here."

Susan felt at his words a recollection of the long drought, of her father and their conversation together, of all her fears interwoven, one with another and inseparable. "I've been ill," she said, "but now I'm well again. What a glorious rain, how clean it washes everything and how sweet the earth smells."

"Yes, it is good after a long drought." He broke off and then asked. "Will you come with me to the top of the downs? It will be all thick mist there, but we may get a glimpse of the sea and the cliffs through a break of cloud."

Susan made a movement of assent. "I was going myself to the hills. I like to feel high up even though one cannot see far. Besides I want to feel what all the different sorts of country are like."

They set off together through the wood along a winding path that led towards the hills. Northover went first, pushing aside boughs that had grown across the path. Near a small opening of the trees, Northover checked and pointed to a large spider's web that stretched obliquely across their way. "Look what a fine large web. It seems a pity to break it after it has stood the rain."

They paused to look at the web, not one of its smallest cross cords was broken. "How wonderful," said Susan, "that it can stand these heavy drops. They come crashing down right through it and yet never break a strand. But see how it trembles. Where's the spider? Do you think she's washed away and drowned?"

"Not she. She'll be in one of the corners of the web, crouching in some leaf. Here she is, where these leaves are spun together, and quite dry too."

"What a foolish spider," laughed Susan, "not to come out for a bath in the wet, but to stay in its stuffy little leaves, the only dry creature in the wood."

"Not the only one, you may be sure; there are all the creatures that live under dead bark and under large stones, wood-lice and their tribe." Tom smiled at her genially. "And then there are all

the creatures that live in houses. They keep in their holes dry and snug. What would your Aunt think, if she knew you were out alone in the wet woods at five o'clock in the morning?"

"My father wouldn't care," laughed Susan. "And Aunt Dorothy — perhaps she'd understand."

They walked on, skirting the spider's web, pressing their way through the dripping branches. At the outskirts of the wood Susan stopped to pin up a coil of hair that had slipped down. Northover stood by, amused at her disregard for the rain which poured down upon them both.

They climbed the hill together in silence. Since their meeting but a few minutes earlier Susan's mood had imperceptibly changed. She had been wonderfully and wholly joyful in the first fall of the rain, and in her escape from illness. She had felt very close in spirit to an unclouded beauty, had felt it tremble beneath her hand. At the moment when she had felt herself most exalted and free, Tom Northover had appeared. He had not in any way shaken her from her high footing, but somehow she had glided off with him on a pleasant by-path. This walk with him was touched with a delicate excitement. But it had changed her mood. She no longer stood upon that pinnacle of self-understanding. Such a moment could not have lasted, and she was glad that he should have come to lead her so easily away.

As the hill rose steeply before them, she had to use all her energy to keep pace. Midway up, they entered a mist of cloud—cold, an all enfolding vapour that blotted out everything but their own forms.

They were climbing the steep sides of Hindon Down, that runs between East and West Swaystead and shuts off the villages from the sea. On its southern side it breaks abruptly into chalk cliffs that drop to broken rocks at the base, where sea water washes. On the north an escarpment, scattered with stunted gorse bushes, slopes to the meadows lying between the two hamlets. As Susan and Tom mounted higher, they came to steep ground, where hundreds of rabbits had made their holes. Here and there, they caught sight of shadowy forms that hurried away into the mist or vanished suddenly into a burrow. Then unexpectedly a rabbit came bounding down the hill, half tumbling, half running. It passed quite close to them, making frantic efforts. A little way down the hill, it came to a stop, and lay still, but for occasional, jerky movements. Tom ran and picked it up, then carrying the rabbit in his hands, walked back towards Susan.

"What is the matter with it?" asked the girl.

"See, it's in a snare and half choked. It must have pulled loose the peg and has got its legs all twisted in the wire."

"Poor thing, it's almost suffocated. How tight

the wire must be round its neck. Its eyes are bulging."

Northover took little notice, but was engaged in untwisting the wire from the rabbit's legs.

"What are you going to do with it?" asked Susan. "Let it go?"

In a few moments he had loosed the wire both from its throat and legs, but still held it firmly in his hands. "No, I shall kill it."

"Why?"

"I know the man who lays the snares. He's a friend of mine and gets his living this way. He's rabbit-catcher to all these hills and gets sixpence a head from the farmers. It's a poor living and I don't see why I should do him out of sixpence. I shall tell him next I see him to fasten his snares better."

With deliberation he took the creature's head in one hand, its hind legs in the other and stretched it till the back broke. "That looks a beastly way of killing them, I know," he said, "but it's really the quickest. They die better that way than by hitting them at the back of the neck."

The rabbit now hung limp in his hand. Susan looked at it, feeling wonder that a vital creature, that had struggled with such endurance against the wire should have died so quickly. Her own wish would have been to let it go, but she did not question Northover's act. She had lived sufficiently in the

woods to realize that life must always be taken to support other life. She knew that death for wild things was not terrible. Its death was simple, as inevitable as its life. She felt a consolation that it should not have died slowly, choked by the wire, but quickly in strong hands.

Northover had now taken out his knife and cut the skin between the tendons of the hind leg and the bone. Through the hole thus made he thrust the other hind foot. He then nicked the tendons so that the foot could not slide back. By placing his finger between the legs he could now carry the rabbit easily. Susan watched all these movements, noticing with a slight feeling of repugnance the film of blood that stained his hand.

"I shall carry it up to the track on the top of the down," observed Northover. "The man will find it there. If I left it here, he might not see it in the mist."

"Do you notice what a pungent smell there is?" said Susan.

"Yes, it's the rabbits; this hillside is alive with them, and their smell hangs low, close to the earth in the fog."

They clambered higher over the slippery ground and soon reached the flat top of the down. Here they both paused to look back, and though they could not see more than a few yards, they knew what a

wide sweep of country lay open to the northward. "Not much to be seen from here," said Tom. "These downs often stop the clouds; further on we may get a glimpse of the sea."

When they crossed the track that runs down the back of Hindon, he flung down the rabbit, and they left its small body deserted on the wet grass. Susan felt strangely implicated in that ruthless act of killing. She hoped that the man would find it and be pleased. They walked together for some distance, passing the shadowy forms of sheep huddled under a stone wall. The sheep-bells clanked with clear hard notes, well suited to the freshness of the air.

Before long they came to Hindon Beacon. From here they could see to southward, where the mist was thinning the rounded sides of the hills. Out between white, ragged vapours of cloud they had a sight of the sea — a grey patch hundreds of feet below, stirring with never-ceasing movement.

"Look," said Tom. "It is as I thought, the clouds only reach to the edge of the hills. You can see the outlines of all the headlands that reach out into the sea, one behind the other." Then turning: "There'll be more rain," he said, "you can see the clouds banking up to the North-West, larger than these."

Susan would have liked to find expression for

some of the pleasure she felt in the sight of those placid, sharply-lined hills. She was checked by a force that seemed, for the moment, outside herself. Instead of speaking of what was uppermost in her mind, she reminded Tom that she must get back by breakfast-time, or else they would miss her and need so many explanations. He said that he would walk back with her along the ridge.

Again they entered the mist, but Susan did not forget the short glimpse of sea and cliffs. At the place where the path descended, her companion paused. "I shall leave you here," he said.

She waited for a moment on the edge of the steep, as if there was something yet to be said. "You will come again? I shall expect you," he added.

She would have answered, but she felt his hands on her shoulders. At the touch she had a remembrance of the blood stains on his fingers; and in the half-second she had to sift her thought, she was surprised to find that she had no resentment. In the next half-second he had turned her round and kissed her mouth. The whole of his movement was of a moment, then he turned and walked away along the hill. She was left surprised, staring into the mist, wondering at the adventure. Her impression of him was as of something untamed and stimulating that had come close to her without touching. He had taken her out upon an adventure, and then had

left her where he had found her, near the pinnacle of her new-found self-expression.

As she walked down through the mist into the valley, she had the full happiness that the first rain had brought.

CHAPTER VII

I

NOW the storm had passed, rain fell more softly, but on either side of the village street still bubbled a small torrent of water. Few people were yet stirring; only an early milk-boy and a postman clad in shining black water-proofs were there to see Susan as she hurried towards her home. The postman looked surprised at her wet figure, but did not forget his manners, touched his cap and said, "good-morning." The milk-boy stood astonished, with open mouth, watching her out of sight. Susan enjoyed his wonderment. She didn't mind if she was wet and looked draggled. She wasn't feeling draggled and didn't care whether the milk-boy thought her mad or not. When she reached the house, she opened the door very quietly, hoping to get to her room without discovery, and so avoid the inevitable questions of where she had been, and what doing. In the hall she took off her wet shoes. She was amused at the water that swished about inside them. Then with stockinged feet, that refused to be squeezed dry, and that left a tell-tale track, she made for her room.

At the top of the stairs she met Caroline, who had heard the door open and had come out to meet her.

The two sisters stood for a moment looking at each other, then both of them laughed. With that laugh and the look that went with it, all their recent shyness of one another broke down. With a return of a droll gaiety, a gaiety that Caroline had missed during the long weeks of drought, Susan looked down at her feet.

"Look," she said, "I'm making quite a pool on the stairs. Come with me, I must change quick. Are the others up?"

Caroline disregarded the question.

"My dear. I thought you were ill but I didn't dare speak of it then — I'm so glad."

"Yes, I'm well now. I've had such a walk. I've been up ever so long."

While Susan changed her wet things, Caroline sat on her bed and talked to her. The restraint that had been between them in the last weeks, was there no more. They were friends as of old. Caroline could feel her sister's happiness. Her own happiness kindled in response. Small details pleased them — the wetness of Susan's hair, the limpness of her discarded clothes. Such things were wonderfully complete, satisfactory and provocative of laughter. They were altogether pleased with one another. Like gay flowers they smiled their mutual admiration.

They talked at first at random of the rain, the storm, the new sweet smell of the earth; no trifle

was too small to laugh over. Between their laughs, Caroline, yet a little distrustful, felt timidly for any vestige of the pain which had cut into their friendship. There was now none of it left. Once more Susan was her confidant. Their talk became personal; Caroline spoke of her own life, telling of all those wonderful-seeming hopes that love had kindled into being. She had wanted to speak before, had needed a friend to reflect, and make more concrete in reflection, her dream. Till now she had not dared speak, not for fear of receiving no sympathy, but because she felt that such a happiness as her own could only have touched in Susan doubt and pain. Now that was altered. Susan listened, wondering and very gentle.

The story that was told was simple, but Susan, as she listened, seemed, to herself, strangely remote from the words. Her thoughts became limpid, almost indifferent. She was not touched by any close sympathy, nor did there come to her the faintest breath of passion. She felt rather as if a new landscape were exposed, a big unexplored country opened before her. She had the spectator's appreciation, but was not critical. As yet she had no judgments, but gazed interested. —“He has taught me,” Caroline was saying, “to see people as separate realities. I had never before seen them so. I know now that wherever there are people, there, if we can only see, is made clear the meaning of life.” She

brushed back her brown hair from her forehead, looking with steadfast eyes at Susan. Her lips remained half open as if there were yet words to be said. Her breath came deep and regular and the soft passage of it through her open lips was charged with all the intense meaning of her body.

Susan had come from her aloof position with a start. She had an impulse to contradict. The wind, she felt, would always be the wind without man's appreciation; the downs would always be the downs. Their smooth outline would endure for ever. They had existed before man, and would survive long after. But she did not speak, seeing her sister at that moment in a new light. The child that she had known and loved had unexpectedly changed. Her spirit was there, contained and expressed by her bodily form, yet what filled her was not the old spirit of childhood. She was a casket filled to the brim by some virtue that Susan could not explain. She might still hold her own beliefs, but she could not then contradict. In her own life she would have to prove how much she was dependent on herself, how much on others. She now listened to the story her sister told. It had a personal appeal. As yet she did not question how near she was to that country which was there unfolded, but the thought was admitted that she herself might adventure in it, on different paths.

Caroline talked of Richard, and about her hopes

of the future. In two years she would be twenty-one, then she would be married. She talked of the schemes they had made, how they were going to travel before they settled at Swaystead. They were going to Italy and France. As she talked, Susan thought that she was already half way out into the world. Her childhood, if not already forgotten, would fade, becoming always more distant. She felt that life was already stretching forth hands that would tighten upon her sister, taking her into regions where the remembrance of her youth would seem like crystal-gazings of remote beauty. And of herself? Would the visions of her own youth survive? She wondered. . . . Words could not answer, only a shiver. The joy of her early mood was replaced by a feeling of sympathy for her sister. She surprised Caroline by unexpectedly kissing her, then, embarrassed at her own action and by a recollection of Tom Northover, she turned away and began speaking of trivialities, laughing at the sleek wetness of her hair, that would not be dried. She reminded Caroline that they must be inordinately late for breakfast.

In the breakfast room they found Dorothy sitting by the window watching the slanting grey shafts of rain. Her face looked drawn and very pale. She had not touched the breakfast, nor had she even poured out coffee for herself. Caroline asked whether her father was not down yet.

"He has been out all night and has not yet come in," said Dorothy. For a moment she sat still, regarding her nieces with hard eyes, then she moved to the table and began to pour out coffee. She made as she did so some slight allusion to breakfast being cold.

Neither of the girls liked to question. The news came chill upon their mood of quickened sympathy. It came too as an unwelcome shock, for with the self-interests of youth they had almost forgotten their aunt's tragedy. Their father had stayed away before, but never had he rushed off so unexpectedly. They felt now very uncertain as to what he might do next, feeling that there was no humiliation he was not capable of inflicting upon Dorothy. They were helpless. All they could do was to wait for the next development. In the meanwhile they spoke awkwardly of commonplace things, avoiding each other's eyes. To keep silent was perhaps the kindest sympathy that they could give. A gentleness in their movements told more eloquently than words of their willingness to give help, if help were possible.

The crisis came sooner than they expected. While they were yet at table, the front door opened and they heard Paul Zalesky's footstep in the hall. He passed the door of the room they were in, and then went upstairs. The three women listened in silence. They could hear him overhead moving from one room to another. "He's in my room,"

said Dorothy. "What can he want?" She moved towards the door.

"Don't you go, let me go," said Susan and stood blocking the way. They were uncertain; the one now flushed and excited, the other anxious and grave. "I can manage him better. You must let me go, please let me go." Susan's grave insistence was convincing.

When she reached the foot of the stair her father was on the upper landing about to descend. His clothes were wet through and his trousers were muddied almost to the waist. His fair hair was plastered over his face, which was white and haggard. He came running uncertainly down the stairs and hardly seemed to see Susan till he was upon her. She noticed that he was trembling with excitement. With one hand clutching the banister he spoke in an exasperated tone that had in it something of reproach.

"Ah, Susan, what are you doing here *now*? Let me go by."

Inadequate words came to her lips. She hoped to check him. She wanted time to guess at what had happened.

"Aren't you going to change your clothes?" she said, "you are wet through and frightfully muddy."

"That is nothing." With a violent gesture he put all such considerations aside. "Let me pass. I am going," he shouted. Then, since she did not move, he flashed at her. "What do you want of me?"

She did not answer but stepped back, perplexed at his violent manner. Then, as if losing all control, he shouted. "Oh, you women, you damned women. How you all hold together! Yes, I know the fine feelings you like to fancy! Things that I outrage! Well, I'm glad! But if I *do* outrage them, I give them opportunity. You women are like children's kites. The more one tugs them to earth, the better they fly. I'll give you your chance," he shouted. Then breaking off, plaintive and petulant: "Susan, what do you want of me? I'm going, going for good to where I shall be outside — away." He suddenly dropped his voice, "Let me go, dear girl, let me go."

Sudden tears sprang to Susan's eyes. She tried to speak but could only make an inarticulate sound that was almost a sob.

"Phah!" he shouted. "Let me go," and ran past her, pushing her aside roughly.

For a moment he wrenched at the front door, then flung it open and ran out. The door slammed behind him. The echo reverberated, then broke off abruptly, as does a cry on a frosty night. The house was very silent. It seemed to be empty of life.

2

The day that followed Paul Zalesky's flight passed painfully. Each hour seemed to tremble in uncer-

tainty of what its moments might betray. Dorothy and her nieces guessed, wondered at, and feared to discover the cause of his strange excitement; and it was not till late in the afternoon that Susan went round to Hilda's cottage. She heard that the girl had left the previous day and that she had gone away by train. Her parents did not know of her destination. Susan also learnt that her father had attempted to travel by the night train to London without a ticket, and had been turned out by the guard three stations up the line. That he had walked back in the rain was conjecture. That was all yesterday's adventure, accounting for his wet, draggled appearance. She could hear no later news. Of course the village was all talking. No one knew anything definite, but rumours of various kinds were afloat.

Susan could not guess how long her father might stay away. She thought that at any time he might return. She knew that he had no money. The shame of the episode struck her hard; she felt for Dorothy, understanding how the scandal would wound her pride. Also she felt that she herself was wincing from a blow. This action of her father's was a deliberate hurt. Again he had struck her at a critical moment.

That morning she had almost forgotten him — was free from the fears he had kindled. Like a mountain-climber high upon a peak, she had been

able to look down upon the stillness of a wide-stretching earth, had not been in the least giddy, but ready to climb higher. Then suddenly this obscurity had covered her, she had put out her hand for support, and had felt beneath it the void of a precipice. Where she stood she was not certain. She was angry with her father, unexpectedly fearing him. He had made her doubt where she had never doubted. She feared that part of him that was in herself.

When, upon the hillside, she had been frightened by the stillness of summer noon, she was frightened at things outside herself, of forces terrifying in their sudden revelation. Now she mistrusted even her own life and the truthfulness of her judgment.

As she entered the house she was full of misgivings. She found Dorothy and Caroline waiting for her in the room where she and her father had talked only the night before. The rain had ceased and the clouds had cleared away; a gleam of bright sunlight lit the window. As soon as she entered, Susan saw from the expression of their faces that a new discovery had been made. She saw that Caroline was bewildered and shocked. Her sister had that look of weariness and helplessness that youth wears in the presence of suffering that it cannot understand. On her aunt's face there was a bitter expression that made Susan wonder how she could deliver the news she had gathered.

"I know where he's gone, you needn't tell me," said Dorothy, her anger rising, and breaking off abruptly. Then after a silence: "He's stolen my jewels to go with that girl. That's why he was in my room this morning."

"No, he's not stolen them, he can't have done that!" said Susan.

"I tell you he has."

"But —" The words died on Susan's lips. She looked at her sister, whose puzzled expression gave her no assurance.

"Tell me where they've gone to!" said Dorothy.

"They have not gone together," said Susan.

"She left home yesterday. Her parents say they don't know where she has gone. She went to escape him. He tried to follow her last night, but hadn't any money. That's why he came back."

"Well, now at any rate, he is free to follow her." Dorothy made a gesture of contempt. "What can he see in that little creature? Why is he infatuated?"

"His love is like a kind of hatred," said Susan; "it's a cruelty. She's frightened of him. I'm sure she wants to escape."

Dorothy looked intently at her niece as though her words had conveyed a truth — speaking to herself she said in a whisper, "He hasn't always been like this."

After a moment Dorothy stood up. "Well,

there's nothing to be done. I hope he may never come back." Then with a laugh. "What's the good of talking? One has to go on living."

Later in the day, Caroline found Susan sitting alone in her room. She came to her quietly, and sat beside her without speaking. Then, taking Susan's hand, she asked: "Does life,— knowledge of things, real knowledge bring always unhappiness?"

"I don't know," said Susan.

Caroline looked pained by her uncertainty. "Hopes must have their realization," she said, smiling.

Susan was in deep thought. "The realities are in one's self," she said. "One must not lose faith."

"Faith in what?"

"In life," said Susan, looking up. Then, as an afterthought. "Though I believe one might lose confidence."

"What difference is there between faith and confidence?"

"Well I feel"—this said Susan after a moment's pause of embarrassment—"that one may be afraid of life—disappointed and yet still believe that there are things worth striving for." Then, as her difficulty cleared away, "It's something like stroking a wild animal that may be ever so friendly or that may turn and tear one to pieces. To have faith in life is to believe that the animal is beautiful even though it tears you, else one shows oneself a fool for being

attracted. But I think, unless one is a fool, one doesn't for long have much confidence."

"And Dorothy — has lost both?"

"Yes. For the time."

"And father?"

"No, he hasn't lost faith. My simile won't cover his case." She smiled. "He takes a lot of killing. He's always pulling the beast's fur — asking for it."

Caroline was serious. "I think you are wrong about your animal. I don't see things that way. It seems to me as if there were two points of view, one sorrowful and the other glad. Those who have the glad point of view are happy and make those they meet happy. The others go about making people sad. Suffering is infectious — Oh! Susan, I want to get away so much. I hate this house!" She stood up, and then walked to the window and pulled up the blind, letting in a flood of clear sunlight. "I want to forget — I want to get away — I don't want to lose confidence — I want to be happy as I know I can be happy." She spoke now passionately and full of resentment. "If cruel things happened to people, we can be sorry that such things have been, but we must not let them infect our own lives. And suffering *is* infectious. It is like some disease."

"Yes, but is it possible to keep separate?"

"I think it is. It's almost as if people stepped

voluntarily into the world of suffering and pain. Once in, they can never step out again. They drag others in. Why, even now we are letting ourselves be touched." Then, breaking off and coming quickly towards her sister, "Susan, I'm going out. Come with me into the garden. It's all so lovely out of doors after the rain. I want at any rate to be out of this house."

As they entered the garden they met the fragrance of a summer's day. The sky arched clear above them, and the distance was definite with sharp outlines. The earth and all that moved upon it was refreshed and made grateful by the rain. The sunlight gave life to everything that it touched and was reflected in sparkling spheres from thousands of rain-drops, which still clung to the leaves and twigs. Since yesterday the world had become young again. They could not fail to appreciate the great fount of youthfulness, which in themselves as in all nature surged with ever-growing power. As they looked at the quiet garden, at the rain-washed earth and sunlight, it seemed that, whatever aspect human life might wear, the life of nature was always reborn, rekindled, with the same mysterious hope, pulsing with the desire to express amply the complete significance of its growth.

CHAPTER VIII

I

IT was not until Paul had been away for more than a week that Susan discovered the quality of her loss. She felt as if some accident had happened to her own spirit. Her heart ached at vague possibilities. In her pain she came closer to Dorothy. The elder woman had been angry, only at the first sting of wounded pride; later she felt only the pain of his absence. "I know he can't help it," she had said. "He was made to suffer in that way."

As time passed, his absence became less poignant; something of the old tranquillity of their life came back. Richard and Caroline could not let their own happiness be much interrupted. They felt that it was a good thing that Paul had gone away. They hoped he would not return.

One day in October Richard came, pleased and excited with news of Northover. He asked Susan and Caroline to guess whom he had seen. Susan guessed at once but said nothing. "It's Tom Northover," said Richard. "What do you think, he's been all this time wandering about in Canada,

and he's been back here for months and never told any one. You know that old ruin on the far side of Bindon, that used to be a monastery? Well, he's done that up and lives there."

"When did you see him?" said Caroline.

"Just this morning. He's a queer fellow, not coming to see any one, and he was as cool and matter of fact as a cucumber about it all. He had come in to Chickworth to buy a dog. He had rather a decent sheep-dog pup on the end of a string and was leading it off. I went along with him to his house. He's made the old chapel into a big room — not half bad. Altogether there's plenty of space in the old ruin, and there's a wonderful view."

"But how charmingly romantic," said Caroline. "We must go and see him. Susan, you'll come too. We'll all go. . . . Is he changed much?"

"I've never seen a fellow more changed, yet somehow he's just the same. He always was a queer fish, you remember; well now he's just as queer only he's grown up and that makes him different."

"How do you mean grown up?" said Susan. "Aren't *we* grown up?" she asked smiling.

"Yes, but we're not so much changed as Tom is. You come and see for yourself. When shall we go?"

"Let's go on Sunday," said Caroline, "and Susan, you will come with us?"

"Yes," said Susan.

Susan's feelings were strangely mixed about this coming visit. She felt that she was glad that she was going with the others, and she felt rather sorry that Tom had been discovered, and was now going to be made public property. She recognized that her feelings were rather selfish. She felt that she would like to have been alone with him when he showed her his house, and told the story of his wanderings abroad. Then she argued that it was absurd to think that she had any first claim on North-over. It was just this idea of people having claims on each other that seemed to her hateful. Such feelings, she felt, must not be allowed to grow.

On Sunday they went as they had arranged to the old monastery.

The chapel which had been converted into the main room was spacious and lofty. The walls were of stone and brick, whitewashed. There were few pieces of furniture: a heavy table, some chairs, a dresser with plates on it, two large chests and a writing desk.

They all agreed that the old monastery made a delightful place to live in. Tom told stories about the two years he had spent in Canada and seemed to account in a very rational way for his living alone in so wild a place. "I've always liked to be away from people," he said. "But don't think I haven't lived in towns. I have till I'm sick of them. . . . I like the view here," he added inconsequently. "I

dare say I won't stay for very long, but it seems a decent place to be in for a bit."

"I think it is much too nice to leave," said Caroline. "You mustn't be in too much of a hurry to go away."

"Oh, well, I've only just arrived," he smiled.

When they left, Tom walked with them over the hill. Caroline and Richard walked together and Tom walked with Susan. "Come and see me again some time," he said. "You haven't yet been down to the cliffs. In the summer the cliffs just under my house have more thrift on them than any of the hills about here. Come again — before the leaves are all fallen," he added.

"Yes, I'll come," said Susan. "I'll come on Wednesday."

He nodded. "Any time in the afternoon you'll find me in or about."

2

When on Wednesday Susan climbed Hindon Down, she did not get far over the ridge before she saw Northover coming to meet her. They smiled a greeting that had no embarrassment. "I'm come to show you a short way through the woods," he said.

For a while they walked among the slender stems of the beech trees, but as the ground sloped away on the other side of the hill, the trees became stunted and their branches were whipped flat by the wind.

Soon they saw the grey tiles of the old monastery and in a few steps they were at the border of the wood.

This second visit was strangely different from the first. As Susan came into the open she felt filled with a quiet spirit of adventure. It was charming of Northover to live in this remote place, perched on the slope of the high down, which was broken, not more than a hundred feet away, by the edge of the cliff. And there in front of them, far below, spread the wide surface of the sea, shimmering, cold and grey in the afternoon light.

Northover walked to the door and pushed it open for Susan to enter. In the fireplace opposite there burnt a log fire, from which small blue wreaths of smoke escaped into the room. The windows let in plenty of light; they were set low in the walls and were of the usual pattern of church windows, Gothic and built of stone. As Susan entered, there sprang up from in front of the fire the withered figure of an old man. His face was overgrown with hair, his bright, brown eyes looked frightenedly at her, like those of a wild animal. She naturally checked at the sight of this strange figure. The old man, who kept his glance fixed on her, shuffled in a grotesque fashion across the room towards an open window. As he went he moved his lower jaw up and down, opening his mouth to its fullest extent, and exposing three long and rectangular yellow teeth, then shutting it

with a smacking sound of his lips. He moved very quietly, and clambered furtively out of the window.

Susan turned to her companion, who was watching her with a look of amusement. She was pleased, as she met his eyes, to think that she had shown no unseemly astonishment, but had kept a grave and considerate face.

"Who is he?" she asked.

"I don't really know, but I'll tell you how I met him. I kept him out of the way the other day. I thought he might be 'just too romantic' for Richard and Caroline." He led her to a window, from where she could see the far-reaching line of the coast, grey in the distance.

"Now tell me what you really think of my place."

"It is glorious!" Her face was full of her admiration. "Not only the view, but the room too, it's not a room," she added, "but a reasonable place. How did you find it?"

"It's that old man's by right of priority, but I'll tell you." He went to the fire and stirred the logs so that the sparks flew in a cloud up the cavernous black hollow of the chimney. Then he placed two chairs, so that they could sit near the warmth, and yet were able to look out of the open door. Outside they could see a few brown twigs outlined against the sky, but beyond, far below, were the waves swirling among the rocks, pressing upwards and onwards in smooth masses to fall away in foam.

"This monastery is ever so old," he began. "When I first found it, it was a ruin. The ceiling and much of the walls had fallen in. I bought the place, and while I was having it repaired I first came across Mad Henry, as they call him. You must have heard of that legendary person."

"Yes, the man who was supposed to live in the woods, but I thought that was only a story."

"No, he's a genuine fact. But now I don't think he ever shows himself on the other side of the hill. People have forgotten about him. What his history has been or what his real name is I don't know. He was a real wild man in the woods in the age of civilization! He caught, killed and cooked his own food, and lived alone. When I first came here, he lived among the bushes that grow on the landslips under the cliff. He was very shy and avoided every one. Sometimes he would throw stones at the children who came after blackberries, when they came too near. As I told you, he used to frequent this place, and when the workmen came to build up the walls they found dead rabbits he had snared, hidden away in odd crannies. Close by this fireplace there was a little pile of well-picked bones. While they were building, he watched them from behind bushes. Now and then he would come out and make faces, and then hide again.

"For some time after I came to live here I saw nothing of him, then one night last September, when

I was lying in bed, he came and looked in at me through the open window. My bedroom is at the back there." He pointed to a door behind them. "You see, I've no upper story. I saw his queer old face wriggling up and down and grinning. Then he began opening and shutting his mouth in a threatening manner. I lay still watching, and didn't show that I was surprised. He moved round the house several times, came back to the window and then moved away. After that he often came, but never in the daytime, until about ten days ago I found him in this room, crouching over a fire that he had made. He was terribly alarmed when I came in, and grimaced horribly. I tried to disregard him as much as possible, and pushed by to the fire and began to prepare my breakfast. Old Henry crouched down in a corner and watched every movement. When I had made some tea I handed him a cup and some bread. He took it but didn't speak. Then I went out to give him time to find himself. Half an hour later when I came back the cup was empty on the table and the old fellow was gone."

Northover reached to the corner for a stake, and held its end in the fire till it blazed. He held it in the smoke till it flickered and went out, then, looking up at Susan with a smile, he went on. "That was the beginning, and day by day he's become less nervous. Now he lives here. He can talk quite sensibly about simple things, but he's not normal. I'm

teaching him to cook for me and to sweep and scrub, all of which occupations he seems to enjoy. In return I feed him and give him a home. But as you see he's very shy of strangers. He probably won't come back now till tomorrow morning."

Susan listened to the story with growing pleasure. She was glad to be alone with Northover in his house, listening to what he said. She wanted to ask questions, to know more of Northover himself, not that she wanted explanations, but more knowledge. He had touched her imagination, and had come within striking distance of veiled sympathies. She wondered if he was fond of that strange mad man whom he had tamed, or was it only the interest of an impartial and unprejudiced mind. Then she wondered whether there could be impartiality where there was understanding, concluding that where there was understanding there must also be love.

"It's a shame for me to have driven him away," she said.

"He'll get accustomed to you in time, and before long I expect. He sees that you are not going to laugh at him."

Susan's next question was to ask how long he had been at the old monastery.

"Five months now; I came in June. I wanted solitude, and I have found it."

"These woods are very lonely," said Susan, "one hardly ever sees any one in them."

For a time they were silent, and Susan's glance rested on the shifting, gliding patterns that played over the surface of the waves far below. Her thoughts became tranquil as she watched the moving water. When she next spoke, she said: "Tell me about the time you've been away."

Northover began without any prelude. "When I left college, I was sick of the life there — sick of smoking cigarettes, drinking coffee and going to 'squashes' and talking. I wanted to prove to myself that I could work, and that I could survive by my own efforts, so I went out to Vancouver with just enough money for my fare and nothing more. When I arrived there, I went into a land-agent's office. I rather hated it. It was a miserable job. I disliked the Canadians and their democracy. But it was all part of the change I wanted. I had good pay and was able to save. When I'd saved enough, I determined to go into the wild country up northward by myself."

He stopped to look up at Susan — a little shy of telling about himself, but seeing her silent interest, was encouraged and went on.

"There is a telegraph line that runs up as far as Dawson City, and all along the line there were camps of men every twenty miles. I walked from camp to camp for some two hundred miles north. Then I met a trapper, a half-caste, and struck inland with him. We travelled together for a week; then he

left me to winter in one of his provision-huts by a small lake. Of course I paid him pretty highly for flour and tinned stuff that he left. He said he was going further north and would have liked me to go with him. But I wanted solitude. I said I'd stay there. He promised to call back for me in the Spring. He left me a gun so that I could shoot fresh meat for myself.

"The day after he had gone I was more happy than I had ever been in my life. I had really found the big wild thing that I had imagined. I listened to the surrounding stillness and felt that something inside me, that had been cramped, might now grow and expand.

"My hut was in a valley between high hills. A shallow lake was caught at one end of it. I remember the first morning, how the mist hung in wisps over the water. Overhead was the clear, cold sky. It was autumn, and until the snow came I spent my time exploring the valley, and climbing the sides of the hills. There was not a man within a hundred miles and then perhaps only another solitary fellow like myself. I wasn't then the least frightened, but only immensely relieved and glad. Then came the winter, biting cold. The mice and small birds became tame, and all kinds of animals crept close to the hut and looked at me. One evening I remember a bear came and sniffed long sniffs through the cracks of the logs. There was no lock on the door, but

merely a prop to hold it to. I was lying on my bed reading at the time; curiously enough I didn't feel in the least afraid. It simply didn't occur to me to be afraid. I think I should have been if there had been another man there, but I'd been by myself then for two months. I didn't even think of stretching for my gun or loading it. Can you understand what an effect solitude has on one?"

"Yes," said Susan.

"I wish I could give you some idea of those winter nights. The stars were wonderful, bright and blazing against the blackest of skies. The ground was covered with snow, and the surface of the frozen lake looked like a flat dish, white and smooth. Every day I used to look for the new tracks of animals and birds that came near my hut. They seemed to make it a centre, and came from all quarters. There were the tracks of my bear, of a lynx, of wild cats, foxes and any number of mice and birds. I used to feed the mice with crumbs. They got quite tame, and would run all over me and in and out of my pockets looking for biscuits; like those over at Burmouth, do you remember? Then there were a couple of foxes who used regularly to come for any offal or meat that I threw away.

"During all that time in which I saw no human being I came to realize what a vast amount of life there was, that went on quite irrespective of man and his interests. This is of course an obvious fact,

but somehow one doesn't always realize it here in England. You see we've killed out everything that doesn't conduce to human comfort. But with that immense, wild country around me I came to realize not only the utter insignificance of myself but the insignificance and relative unimportance of mankind. It was not, however, any of these thoughts that frightened me. Fear did not come till the springtime.

"One day when the snow had all melted, and the young green shoots were pushing their way up through the thawed soil, it was then that I felt panic. I was up on a hill-side, and suddenly the view of valley and rocks, which I looked down upon, seemed to be part of a world on which I had no function or significance. I had a sure understanding, a fatal knowledge, that I was cut off, not only from the failing interests of men, but even from the tireless fructifications of Nature. The ardent youth and rejuvenescence of the awakening year seemed to me useless; the dead and snow-covered mountains were in their remote dignity more significant than the green seedlings. Yet that impulsive push of life most frightened me. I felt that I was out of it. My new-awakened understanding had cut me free. There was no place for me — neither among the still cold of the mountains, nor amid the push of life, quickened by the springtime.

I was frightened, yet I felt, even more than I felt my fear, a kind of despair. To save myself from this I wanted to get back to man, to warm myself with the near presence of other people — But it was not possible for me to get back. I had to stay where I was. I'm glad now that I had to. Later I was able in a way (I daresay, in a very unsatisfactory and incomplete way) to reconcile those two aspects."

Susan interrupted. "You mean that of the coldness of the mountains, which seemed dead, and life."

"Yes, reconcile them both intellectually and emotionally. The latter is the more difficult by far; but such things must always be incomplete." He paused, as if he found it difficult to get a clear expression of his thought. "When I say 'intellectually,' perhaps I use the wrong word, since I could not explain what form that reconciliation took. Such things are altogether *within* the mind. I doubt whether they have any direct outward expression."

"I know what you mean," said Susan. "Tell me what happened."

"Well, I stayed on because I had to, and was quite happy by the time my trapper arrived. We were at the hut together for a short time; then we went back to the camps on the telegraph line. Soon after that I came back to England. I suppose I did have something left of that desire to bury my-

self amongst people, for I lived in London; but I soon tired; again I wanted solitude, so I came and found this place."

Tom stood up, walked to the door and looked out. "Here, I have found what I want for the time. As each year passes from spring to winter, there is always something new to find out. There is some clue. Things are often symbolized by tiny incidents."

"Now are you never afraid?"

He laughed—"Once afraid, always afraid. But one can be on good terms or bad terms with life."

"When you were alone—that time in the spring when the snow was melting—were you on good terms then?"

"That was my introduction."

"And then you were frightened of outside things just as I was when you saw me; not of things in yourself, or things that might come to you—things in life?"

"I can see what you mean, but I have never been frightened in that way. What comes from inside can be trusted to find its way out, just as leaves and plants have their character and expression."

Susan thought for a while. "One might lose strength," she said, "like a fruit-tree that blossoms and dies."

"That's abnormal."

"But it can be beautiful — and how can one tell — how can one know?"

"One can't." He thought for a while, then said: "These things are all a matter of power, vitality. Some are fated to blossom and die, others will make wood, leaves, bark and the rest of it. Don't press the simile too far." He laughed again. "But please don't commend me to a tree that's afraid of its own buds."

Susan blushed and added, smiling: "It would be convenient though to know one's own variety."

"Yes, but don't press the simile, it may lead one to false and absurd conclusions. You will stay and have something to eat?" he asked, "then I will walk back with you over the hill."

"Yes, if you don't think I shall drive your man away. I shall want to make friends with him."

When they had finished their meal they walked back along the hill-path together. This time they skirted the wood and kept to the open so that they had a view of the sea, flat and steep to the horizon. The sun was setting and the ample undulations of the downs were soft and grey in the evening light. Heavy and motionless these stood in marked contrast to the restless and shimmering sea. Beneath them, the cliffs crumbled with the accumulated mass of their weight.

On the top of Hindon, they paused, near the place where together they had peered through the clouds

on the morning of the storm. Now the sky was clear and deep above them. Inland, the plain, sparsely dotted with houses, stretched to the distant line of brown hills. To the sea-ward, sky and water met on the big arc of the horizon, and to the west a distant light-house had already begun to wink its feeble spark.

With a sudden nervousness Susan turned to her companion. "Good-bye, I shall go by myself from here." She did not offer her hand, but in the quick movement of departure she gave him a look of friendliness.

Northover stood on the hill-top, watching her till she was out of sight. She did not look back. Later, he had a distant glimpse of her on the outskirts of a wood. Then he turned and walked to his house through the fading light.

CHAPTER IX

I

THROUGHOUT the autumn and winter, as Susan came to know Tom Northover better, she seemed to know herself less well. She felt that imperceptibly and without any great inner convulsion she was losing her assurance. She had to admit to herself that she was attracted; but she was also repelled. There was something cold and frightening: yet that very coldness she found likeable. She felt that often he was able to hold aloof from human impulses, that often he could understand without feeling. She thought him not quite human in his relation to Mad Henry. He tolerated the old man's weakness, but showed no compassion. She doubted if there were any pity in his nature, and was puzzled that these two strange men should have come to live under the same roof. This circumstance she could only explain by comparing it with one of those odd accidents in nature when animals quite dissimilar in habit live together in the same hole. What was most outstanding and shone most brightly in their friendship was that she could show her thoughts without fear of his seizing an advantage to invade her reserve. His egoism was re-

freshing in that it seemed self-sufficient, and did not want to impose itself. Besides this she liked his mind. Often the clarity of his perception could explain what was obscure. She was grateful for the interchange of thoughts, grateful too that he had not again offered to kiss her or to lay hands on her. That he did not do so, at first rather puzzled her, until she perceived that his method of wooing was, if less direct, no less exciting. It was through the mind that he attacked, and often there seemed roughness and brutality. But always there was this refreshing assurance that he did not want to impose himself, and that she had been right in judging that his egoism was of a self-sufficient type.

Once they were talking about her father and the possibility of his return. "Yes, I think he'll come back," said Tom.

"Why?"

"He sounds as if he's the sort to come back. He'll get tired and frightened. He'll want to see you again, and to get his mind clear. Besides he'll find it so pleasant to be forgiven."

"His mind clear?" questioned Susan, choosing to disregard his last remark.

"Yes. For him to have rushed off like that shows that the girl has got into, not only his blood, but his mind. It's some sort of kink. He thinks he's got to discover, or rather straighten out something."

"Yes, that's it."

"It's not a question of love," Tom continued.

"No, she's afraid of him, and no wonder. That's why she ran away."

"Yes, it's simple enough from her point of view, but I expect with him it's no longer only emotional. When sex goes to the head it's more cruel than mere brutality. . . . I wish I'd known him," he said after a pause. "When I was a boy I hardly took any notice of 'grown-ups.'"

Susan resented the aloofness of his interest. "Did you never think of being a doctor?" she asked with sudden anger.

Tom saw her annoyance. "I haven't the bedside manner," he said.

Susan laughed — after all she liked him for his aloofness. "No — and I'm glad you haven't."

2

Dorothy Tyler was ill during November. The shock of Paul's desertion had, in the first few weeks, stimulated her too nervous excitement; later she seemed of a sudden to fall to pieces, losing control upon life. Sometimes she gave way to fits of weeping, at others she would stray about the house from room to room, moving restlessly and without aim. Bitter thoughts turning constantly in her mind would not be quieted. The theme of her conversation would constantly be Paul, his whereabouts, and the chances of his return. It was hopeless to pretend

that she did not care. She cared indeed so much, that she confessed that should he return she would forgive everything. Her bitterness had died when she found that her love was stronger than her resentment. Each day she looked for news, believing that he would write. As time passed and no letter came, she became slowly reconciled to his silence, though her health did not recover. Susan became anxious about her; she considered that it would be a good thing to take her away for a change.

It was at this time that Susan began to feel the strong contrast between her life in the village and the now frequent meetings with Tom Northover. She had tasted for long the joys of solitude, and knew that in solitude were created complete worlds of fancy where at times move strange visions. In prolonged loneliness of thought or feeling there is nearly always pain — out of this pain are born a number of beautiful images. They lie exposed crystal within crystal; they flash into being and pass like shadows, like the smoky and fleeting figures, which for an instant live in the heart of a clear jewel. Such happiness lies on the further side of solitude, and into this region Susan could step when she reached the woodland path on the hill-top. From her childhood she had paid the price, living her own thoughts, seeing her own pictures of the world. What was now extraordinary for her was

that Tom shared this country of her dreams. He was there by his own right yet strangely remote from her life. Sometimes, when she was with him, she was puzzled by her own feeling of remoteness. She was free from fear and hope, even from compassion. She took him and herself for granted just as she did the wide sweep of the downs. She was glad of him — there was place for all attributes of life.

At Christmas Richard came. He was full of his own plans and of the excitement of having come into an unexpected sum of money. He wanted to marry Caroline at once. Long engagements were bad for every one concerned, he said. It was absurd that they should have to wait another year. If they were married now, they could live in London together for a short while; he would be able to continue his work. Then, when he was qualified, they could settle down to their permanent home.

Caroline was fluttered and rose excitedly to the idea. She came to Susan that she might talk of this new possibility. She found Susan not very encouraging.

"You are only just twenty," said her sister. "Why be in so much of a hurry?"

Such remarks, as soon as they were uttered, seemed awkward and cold. Susan wondered how it was she could sound so stuffy; yet her words expressed

a deeply felt conviction. Caroline thought them merely perverse. "He says I can help him ever so much at his work," she said.

"How?"

"Susan, you are stupid. By just being there."

"What do you yourself want?"

Caroline avoided the question. She thought that if Susan had been tactful she would have talked to her, instead of being so silent and questioning. She started a new line. "It seems horrid to go away from here and leave you alone with Aunt Dorothy, when she wants so much looking after—but if I stay he'll be so disappointed—And oh, Susan, ever since father left I have felt as if this house were haunted by miserable things."

Susan smiled, though she screwed up the corners of her eyes to show that she was not going to be too sympathetic.

"I know you may think that imagination; but, when one has a chance of being happy, one ought to take it. I'm so afraid of obstacles—things get in the way. I feel that this house was not made for my sort of happiness."

"I don't think I believe in obstacles."

"What do you mean?"

"I believe if one could look at things from outside, from far enough off, there would not appear to be any obstacles to one's growth, only to one's wishes."

"But one's wishes are so much. They are one's self."

"Only a part of it."

Caroline was silent a moment. How was it she had got so far from what she wanted to say, or rather from what she wanted to hear? Susan could be rather terribly, she thought, and horribly superior. "Susan, have you ever been afraid?" she asked.

"Indeed, yes. But not," she added after a pause, "of things that were going to happen to me or not going to happen to me; but afraid of life as something big and terrifying."

"Well, I'm frightened of waiting, of accidents. We've seen so much unhappiness. I think happiness is so rare. It ought to be accepted when it offers."

"You poor dear," said Susan, suddenly melted. "Life has seemed hard. You must do just as you think — only —"

"Only what?"

"Nothing. . . . I'm full of things I don't understand myself. We are both so disgustingly young. But I wouldn't be old for all the wisdom in the world. Go along and get married," she laughed.

Caroline laughed and kissed her. She had won her sister to the mood she wanted. Now she could pour out all she had to say. Till she had said it her egoism carried her on unthinking. Then suddenly she remembered Susan. "But, Susan, what will

you do, supposing I'm married in April, as Richard wants?"

"I've been thinking of going right away with Aunt Dorothy; she wants a change and now this seems a good opportunity."

"Yes, it does. I'm glad you are going. This house is awful. I'm sure you ought both to get out of it."

"I don't feel as you do about the house. I shall be sorry to leave, but think it's best to go right away, perhaps for six months."

"Where would you go?"

"I don't know. Perhaps London, perhaps we might go and stay with Aunt Caroline at Christchurch. I hope it won't be London for all those months."

Caroline's thoughts were already wandering. She smiled as if everything were turning out for the best, as if the universe were revolving as it should in a well behaved manner round her own centre of gravity. "I'm glad you are going away," she said. "I shouldn't like to have left you here all alone." She gave Susan's hand a squeeze as they walked into the house together.

3

In April Caroline was married in the Church at Swaystead. Richard took her away for a three weeks' honeymoon in Devonshire, and Susan was

left feeling very much alone. Susan was glad that she had almost matured her plan of taking Dorothy to Christchurch. She didn't admit to herself how empty she found the house, and how much she missed her sister. She would be glad to change for a while her surroundings.

Northover had been away since the end of January. He was in London but had promised to be back early in April. Susan hoped she would see him before she left.

Although she knew that he hated the receiving or writing of letters, she wrote to him the day after Caroline's wedding telling of her proposed departure. Two days later he walked into the Swaystead garden thanking God that he was back in the country and wondering at his folly at having spent so long in London. "The life there gets hold of me," he said. "I meet people and see things. I've been trying to paint pictures," he laughed, "not that I can do much in amongst all that talking, but there's a fellow there from Essex, who did some fine drawings. He sees things much as I see them, and gets the effect wonderfully. I believe I could do something in that line if I tried and went on trying." He smiled at his own confidence. "I shall try."

When Tom was alone with Susan he told her he was glad she had written. "It just needed that to get me away from the groove I was getting into. I'm ever so glad to be back. The spring here is

wonderful. In London one hardly realized it had come. Tomorrow let us go right away along the coast, following the downs, and take lunch and have tea at Sutworth, if that's not too far."

"Yes, I'd like to come," said Susan, "for a last look at the country before I go away."

4

The next day as they crossed the valley and began to ascend the hills beyond West Swaystead, a mild spring morning embraced the earth with its gentle caress. The woods in the valley were thick with daffodils; primroses bloomed in every clearing. Under the beech trees on the hill top, dog's mercury and young bluebell shoots made a green carpet. Out of the sticky buds of the horse-chestnut were bursting leaves like small pale-green hands. Yet in spite of all the ardent gaiety of the flowers, there was in the quiet wealth of sunshine something a little melancholy and sad.

To be deeply dipped in such spring weather, surrounded by the sprouting life of leaf and tree, can at such times be poignant, almost intolerable. The spirit of springtime is then a beautiful and slumberous figure, rising from the earth. Sometimes between the tree-stems there is a glimpse of the heavy peaceful face. Unexpectedly the eyelids are raised. The revelation stabs the heart of the beholder. In the look there is life, awakening vigour, also an in-

tolerable weight of languor. A glimpse is given of the massiveness of earth, complete, self-contained, substantial. And, potent as the very forces which mould and bind the soil, there is revealed a tender spirit which whispers of all the hopefulness of buds. As the eyes close, it vanishes trembling.

In the human mind, a like spirit awakens; senses are quickened and the imaginative heart can feel the sting of sharp and acid sap, which, pumped by a thousand roots up from the earth, inflates buds and leaves. Under foot the green hands of seedlings unfold from among the *débris* of autumn.

On a small clearing of ground not far from the crest of the hill a number of closely-scattered seedlings were hopefully expressing their intention to live. Susan and Tom paused to look at this diminutive forest. After the first gladness of their morning start they had become silent. The feel of springtime in the air had been too all-possessing to allow of much talk, but at the sight of the open glade of seedlings Susan exclaimed, "Look how confident they are with their green hands open as if they were saying their prayers."

"Yes, they are certainly confident, yet you'll find very few of them left next year. They are expressive of all the life which each year is wasted."

"I suppose all that appears to us waste really marks the vitality of a species," she said. "It's a splendid superfluous energy. Look!" she made a

gesture. "What a generous margin of extra force."

"Perhaps all life which is prodigal has a claim to nobility?" He went on to talk to her of the struggle for existence. He talked of the sea and of the fierce struggle for life that goes on under the surface — of all the ugliness and beauty. They were led on to speak of the contention between human beings and of the classes of society. And all the while they talked of such apparently remote things the spring-time and the spring forces within them were pressing them closer together; and, as they spoke of life, life came to claim them for its own inscrutable purpose.

"Philosophies and systems are a sign of weakness and failing vitality," Tom concluded. "If one is healthy one believes in the evidences of the senses and the prompting of desire."

By this time they had walked on some distance through the wood, and had come to a rough fence, that ran along at some paces from the cliff's edge. Far below there was a flat shelf of dark rocks which ran out, shaped like a scythe, into the sea. Close about it were green, clear spaces, unruffled by ripples. Northover paused by the fence resting his hand on it. He looked keenly at the girl who did not look at him but at the distant wavelets which broke upon the beach.

"Are there not contrary desires? Do you think one can be quite sure?" said Susan.

He answered after a pause: "Yes, I am sure."

Susan felt all his masculine conviction put into that answer. She did not dare look up, but watched the moving patterns which gusts of wind caused upon the sea's surface. She thought of all the fierce life that went on underneath, and she remembered frail shells and sea-anemones that she had found in rock pools; she recollected stories told by divers of the beauty of the sea floor; and again she thought of the relentless struggle for life, and for the continuance of life. Through all these thoughts she was conscious of the man beside her; she felt that she was being pressed onward by him into the whirl of contending forces. Then with conviction she knew that she was partially afraid of, and yet attracted by, his ruthless attitude. Without looking up she knew that he was looking at her. She could hear that he was breathing-in deep breaths. Then she felt his hands on her shoulders and his firm strength as he turned her round. His voice when he spoke sounded abrupt and rough. "Susan, do you love me?"

"No, no, take your hands away."

He bent down, not losing his grasp.

She spoke to him in appeal. "No, no, I don't want that. Let us be as we have been; it has all been so beautiful."

"You child," he said, "you're afraid. Susan, you love me." He put his arms about her and kissed her mouth, her eyelids and her hair. She lay very

still and pale in his embrace, making no resistance. It was almost as if she were dead, she was so still and pale. He looked at her, puzzled. The silence between them hurt him; it seemed like a reproach. He spoke her name to call her to life.

She looked up at him, her blue eyes wide open. Her will had come back. "No, you must let me go. I don't want that. I don't want it. We have something so valuable; don't let it be spoilt like that. I love you, yes, very much in one way, but not like that."

"That's not true," he broke in, "you're afraid. You are my woman, and I've known that from the first. We understand each other. We are man and wife." Then, seeing she was still shrinking from him and perplexed, "You can't help yourself by hiding yourself."

Again he kissed her, this time more gently as she lay unresisting in his arms. "Tom, I hate the idea of marriage. I hate it." She looked at him with fear in her eyes.

He was a little chilled by the recognition that her dread was intellectual. "It's only a form," he said, "a convention. It doesn't touch what brings —"

She interrupted him with a passionate sincerity.

"It does, it does. No, I don't want to marry you or any one." She had pushed herself half free and stood at arms' length, one hand pressed against his chest.

"That's nonsense, Susan," he said seriously. "You can't turn your back on life."

"It isn't life. It kills the life I want." Her eyes shone and her nostrils twitched with her alarm. "Lovers," she said, "they want to possess, and own. I've seen it. They are so small — mean. I hate — love — marriage! Oh, no, I want to belong to myself."

Tom looked at her now with a smile. "Well, child, don't be terrified. Of course you belong to yourself so far as is possible; and I'm no more friends with marriage conventions than you are. But marriage is one of the things we have to stoop to. To defy it is too much trouble; it uses up too much energy. I hate to appear to be a rebel; it's so undignified. Now give me your hand and kiss me."

Susan kissed him with sudden simplicity. There was no passion at that moment between them, and they could afford to laugh at themselves. The next moment Tom's hand tightened upon hers. "You must go your own pace but, you'll find that our individualities need not be crippled. They remain separate. They must bend, they need not be twisted or broken. We are nature's slaves one way or another, but yet we can keep our spiritual freedom," he said with conviction. Then after a pause: "Look about you and understand. You and I, so far as nature is concerned, are just bits of procreating

earth — like the trees, or the animals or earth itself. In the kiss of that union there is harmony. There is no need for fear."

Susan shook her head. "But I *am* afraid," she said. "I don't understand it all. Please let us walk on."

Tom yielded at once. He felt sure of her. He loved her independence, believing that he could come close to her without smirching in any way her virgin spirit.

5

When Tom and Susan sat down to tea in the inn at Sutworth they both felt that intellectual contentment and activity which is produced by a pleasant physical tiredness — a tiredness which will soon pass, and is only the ache of limbs that enjoy their labours. They had walked ten miles along the sea cliffs, had been up and down over swelling undulations of hills, through woods and across wide open spaces. They had told each other that they had never seen the country so beautiful or the sea so calm and inviting. The incidents of the walk had given subjects for conversation which they had touched lightly — a lightness which concealed knowledge of emotions ready to blaze up at the challenge of any moment.

Susan felt a happy excitement at her heart. Her own contradictory feelings made her excited. She was glad to be with Tom, delighting in the sense of antagonism and mutual attraction.

While they were eating the good things provided by the inn their hostess came in with a rather perplexed face. "I'm sorry to interrupt you two," she said, "but there's a woman would speak with the young lady."

"Who is she?" asked Susan.

"She's a Mrs. Miller." The woman paused, then added: "Some think she's not usual in her head — I told her you wanted none of her words but her mind's set on seeing you and she would not heed me."

"But I don't know her."

"Maybe not, but she saw you come in and will speak with you, she said." The hostess lowered her voice. "There's some say she's a witch. Be fair spoken with her. At first I told her I would not let her in, but seeing how set she was I did not like to go against her."

"What! A real witch?" said Tom. "Let's have a look at her."

"Yes, some say that," the woman smiled apologetically. "But I don't believe it myself, though she is a bit queer. They say she left a duck foot on Mrs. Trantly the Post-Mistress' doorstep, after they'd had words, and two days after her daughter died. . . . There, I believe she is in the passage. Shall I let her come in?"

"Yes," said Susan, feeling the colour mount to her cheeks.

Mrs. Miller did not look the traditional witch. She was rather stumpy and fat, but she was old and her dark bright eyes at once gave her an individual and strange look. As soon as she entered the room, she walked across to where Susan was sitting. She screwed up her eyes and stood looking at the girl for a few moments. "When I saw you pass, dear, I knew I mid speak with you," she said. "You're a leaf which mid bide green till past the harvest; but in winter the leaves must kiss the earth, child. Though you're proud by your looks, you'd best kiss the earth in springtime, too. You're a free girl, as I was myself, and I wish you well with the strapping young fellow you have. Let him press you to the ground and you'll rise the stronger on your feet and I make no mistake."

"And what, Mother, do you say to me?" said Northover to save Susan's embarrassment.

Mrs. Miller turned on him the direct look of her dark eyes. "I say to you that you will not always know the good fortune that mid be yours." Again she turned to Susan, "though he can do you no harm, my dear, no harm at all."

"When first I saw you I knew at once. A leaf that will be green after the harvest; not so many pass this way that I should miss one. Will you give me your hand, my dear."

Susan stretched out her hand. She felt a strange thrill up her arm as Mrs. Miller touched her. The

old woman did not examine the lines on her hand, she merely held it and muttered. "Your danger is not yet for a long while. He can do you no harm. And now I wish you good luck,"—she looked straight at Susan—"and may a fair child spring from your love." Without troubling to speak again to Northover she turned and walked to the door.

"What an extraordinary old woman," said Tom as soon as she had gone. "She's a fairly good approach to a witch. I'm glad she didn't leave any ducks' feet on us," he laughed.

Susan looked at him for some moments with her thoughts straying. She said: "I'm glad she liked us," then after another interval. "But she doesn't understand."

6

A warm spring evening followed a perfect day. When night came, there was no sudden chill. The air was gentle, and among the beech-trees a warmth of sunshine seemed to have been caught and held. The stars were very bright and a half-moon revealed the contour of the woods, lighting up dark yew-trees which grew here and there among the thickets of the down side. A late thrush sang far into the darkness.

Near the border of the wood Susan lay with her face pressed to last year's dead leaves and sobbed. Her sobbing was now gentle and regular, though earlier it had shaken her with a desperate anguish. To Tom it seemed as if her sobs would never stop.

He sat beside her holding his knees. He did not speak and moved very little, only turning his head sometimes to look at her, then turning it away to look through the tree stems at the fairy-like undergrowth, which bordered the edge of the down. After what seemed a long time he stretched out his hand to touch her shoulder. She made no response. He tightened his fingers squeezing her flesh. "Look up at the stars," he said.

"I can't, I can't."

"Then listen to the stillness."

Susan was silent.

"Are you afraid?"

"No."

"Then look up at the stars."

"Not yet, Tom."

He took her hand, squeezing it in assurance. "Then look at me and don't cry any longer into the beech leaves." She turned a white, tear-stained face towards him. "Dear child, nothing so very terrible has happened to you. You are the same, unchanged in yourself — changed only by a kiss and an embrace. Physical things are only physical; but they should bring happiness."

"Yes," said Susan, "give me time."

Tom bent to kiss her. She put her arms round his neck. "I'm glad," she whispered.

He laughed gently and helped her to rise so that

she leant on one arm looking at him. "I was afraid, terribly afraid — but I'm still free."

"Yes, of course. Look up at the stars. There's plenty of room there."

Susan lay back looking up through the branches and twigs into the black depths between the stars. Tom still held her hand; he lay down beside her gazing up into the night. The thrush had ceased to sing. All was still.

After a long while of silence she said, "I am happy now; let us go home."

"Where? To Swaystead?"

"Where else?"

"Come to my house. It's where we shall live now."

Susan was thoughtful, not answering for a few moments. "Very well," she said. "But why not stay here?"

"It will be too cold by morning. Come to my house and we can look out over the sea in the moonlight."

7

When Susan awoke next morning she found Tom standing beside her bed. "You've slept ever so late," he said, "you were tired. Shall I bring you some breakfast in here?"

"Oh, no, I'll get up. How strange it is. What a nice room — what a window, and what a view!"

She looked at the far line of the cliffs and over the sea. "I must get up at once and go to Dorothy. What will she think has happened to me?"

"I'd quite forgotten about her," said Tom. "Very well, I'll have breakfast ready by the time you're dressed."

Susan was very glad to find herself left so free. She remembered that Tom had not taken her to his own room, but that this other had been their nuptial chamber. At what time he had left her she was not certain, but she was glad to feel that this was her own room. While she dressed, she shivered at the thought of her adventure. There grew a small cloud in her mind which became larger as she thought. No, she didn't want to be married. At breakfast her thought found expression.

"Tom, although I should like living with you here, I don't want to be married. I dislike marriage. People get so full of their possessions and of possessing each other. Besides, what has it got to do with anybody else?"

"I know what you mean," he said, "and I've thought about it a good deal. I don't think rebellion is worth the penalty. Besides I hate to be a rebel, it almost makes a slave of me. Such social conventions as marriage are too strong for us. It's not worth while wasting our strength against them. What we are in ourselves we know. The ceremony

of marriage will not tie either of us, so what does it matter?"

"Still, don't you think the regard of other people makes a difference? They look upon you in such an insulting way as if you were each other's possessions."

"Yes, I know: that has to be endured. It doesn't really make much difference—I've seen people who've tried to do without. Their lives are martyrdoms to a cause in which they soon cease to believe. Then again I think there is something arrogant, almost vulgar, in letting one's personal life be in any way advertised; and openly breaking conventions is an advertisement. The best thing is to bend to the convention and live one's own life as far as possible. One of the chief principles in life, if you mean to live, is to escape observation. You have a better chance then of belonging to yourself. If two people live together without being married, all the respectable world is against them. They are thrown together in quite an unfair way."

Susan was thoughtful. "Yes," she said after a pause. "It is probably much more simple than I imagine." She smiled at her own thoughts. "It will take me a day or two to get accustomed to the idea; and it's only because I'm sure that you would hate to be tied that I submit."

Tom laughed and kissed her. "We are neither of us likely to get stuffy," he said. "Now, let's

come and tell Dorothy about it. I wonder what your father'd say."

"Oh, father," said Susan, with a sudden twinge at her heart. "I'm almost glad he's away. I don't think it could all happen if he were here. He'd be jealous."

As they walked over the hill, Susan became light hearted as never before. "Do you remember the morning of the rain?" she said. And when they reached the place where Tom had first kissed her, she again gave him her lips. She was once more happy and on a pinnacle of self-expression. She felt free as air. She had kissed earth in the spring-time, and was burning with the ardour of that kiss.

PART II

**Verbrennen musst du dich wollen in deiner eignen
Flamme: wie wolltest du neu werden, wenn du nicht
erst Asche geworden bist!**

NIETZSCHE.

/

CHAPTER I

THERE is a line faintly, often elusively, drawn between youth and that second period leading to middle age, wherein our moods no longer come to us entirely from without, but are gendered by the fermenting or digesting experience absorbed in the eager hours of our first hunger. None of us know just when we pass that line, but we know when we have stepped over. It is then perhaps, that we are first conscious of the power of contemplation. We can pause for happy moments, and, if we are lucky enough, let fall away, together with the bustle of life, the strivings of youth. But this is only for moments; youth claims us again, and we are glad to feel his masterful touch.

It was soon after her marriage that Susan passed this faint, indefinite line. After she was married, she and Tom had gone to live in the solitary house on the cliff's edge. The old home and the loved garden, where she had spent so much of her childhood, had been given up, and Mrs. Tyler had gone to live at Christchurch. Susan was happy with, at first, a new and troubling happiness; then one day she found that the troubling element had disappeared. It had given place to a calm translucent

satisfaction. The past years of her youth and adolescence were now remote. She was able to find a direct pleasure in the sea that broke at the cliff's foot, in the woods that encircled her, and in the open sky and white fleeting clouds. Nature was warm, close-pressed against her heart. Sometimes in the depth of her calm happiness she felt that the strength and fecundity of nature was a mirror of herself — herself a symbol of nature's fecundity. She had the contentment that knew how to contain, but which felt that it was overflowing.

Her husband was the touchstone to the magically transformed world. She valued his untamed wildness and aloofness, his moodiness, his many interests that led him away from her. She was glad that he was sufficient without her, though enriched by her contact. He was like a landscape both remote and present, his distance faded to a far-flung horizon. His touch made her feel that he was not limited to his skin and his flesh. The source of his river was far away, elemental — the more remote the more of value. Yet there was limitation. Their intelligences, so different in fibre, could only find contact through laughter, or a sense of something a little ludicrous in their physical affinity. In his touch she always felt the primitive, the unmasked male. His caress held all the youthfulness and absurdity of nature — laughable, a sweet stupidity which at a sudden sliding of emotions revealed a mystery, whose

elements of dread were held distant by the tender completeness of her satisfaction.

For a year they lived with an easy contentment in the old house on the down. Sometimes they walked to distant places and slept at country inns, but mostly they stayed at home, and Susan busied herself in the usual occupations of a country woman. In the house-work she was helped by Mad Henry who seemed to become less mad and less scared as the months went by.

The people of West Swaystead rather wondered at the remoteness and comparative isolation in which the Northovers lived. But the isolation was more apparent than real. Susan went regularly to Swaystead and kept in touch with most of her old acquaintances. Tom spent a good deal of his time making water-colour drawings, that never for very long satisfied him. Susan was equally happy whether she was tidying the house or listening to his discontented criticism of his own work. It was all part of the general peace that had come upon her. His work was part of that also. In the lines of his landscape she found the primitive confidence of his manhood; in the forms of trees and of the downs that he portrayed were the hidden secrets of a passion that touched her heart, but which left her soul naked and translucent. And, best of all, his work showed that he left her free. He made no claims upon her soul; and she perceived with very clear

simplicity that the physical relationship of marriage was no bondage, the life of the body was so young, so sweet, so laughable. She was free; for could she not hold, contract and direct the current of all happenings through the lens of her own emotion?

In those first months of marriage, enclosed between the sea's wide freedom and the whispering twilight of the woods, nature was a kind nurse, smiling upon her children, who so simply could accept her mandate, forgiving their laughter, assured of the great strength of her tightening grip which holds mankind as slaves to bend or be broken by the onward insistence of her course.

They were walking together one evening over the smooth back of Hindon Down when Tom sprang upon her his idea.

"Susan, I want to go to London to learn to draw, to draw human beings. I can sketch, I know how to feel things about light and colour, but I want to draw figures, to learn technique."

He had been thinking over his plan for some weeks, but had said nothing about it until he was sure. The happiness of this woodland peace was not a thing to be lightly broken, but something had struck within him that told him that he must move. Ambition, though of slow birth, was stirring. He wanted to measure himself against others, and most of all to be criticized and scolded by those who had gone further. He wanted to secure that leanness

and alertness of mind that come from sharp criticism.

In the short pause after he had spoken Susan divined his feeling and his need. She was glad. The idea had that rightness that commends itself, needing no arguments. As for herself — what did it matter whether she carried her peace to London or cherished it here in the country?

"Yes," she said, "when do you want to go?"

"Oh — soon." He paused for a few seconds. "It will mean staying away for a year at least, probably longer, perhaps altogether."

"Then we give up the house here?"

"We needn't give it up, we can come here from time to time. Do you mind?"

"No, I'm rather glad," said Susan slowly. "It's just one of those things that have to come." Then after a pause she said: "It fits in rather curiously. A few days ago — I didn't tell you about it — I heard from my father. He is in London, and seems to have freed himself more or less of entanglements. He writes quite cheerfully, saying that he has work and is earning money. He has offered to pay back Dorothy not all but most of what he took. She won't have it and has sent it back. He laments her stupidity — I can see him shrugging his shoulders. It seems rather out of character and stupid of him, and cruel, offering to pay back, but his motive is plain enough. It is some sort of sop to his con-

science or rather what he thinks I demand of his conscience, and now — although he doesn't dot the i's or cross the t's he considers himself free to write to me. I can't think of him as reformed and respectable, and of course he isn't. He's as much a child as ever; he tells me with touching naïveté that he has lost the habit of talking about himself. He wanted to come here and see us, but now it will be better to meet in London."

"As you know, I never knew him well," said Tom, "I shall be glad to meet him again, though I don't think he likes me. Do you think he'll be jealous?"

The question went deeper than Susan at the time realized, but her answer came quick and sure. "No, I don't think so. And as to liking you," she said with a faint ring of annoyance, "he'll like you if you don't judge him."

Tom said nothing for some moments while they walked on over the hill; then: "The worst of it is he's the sort of man one has to love or despise."

"Or both," said Susan.

"I don't see that."

"No." Her voice was cold; she felt that Tom was intruding. "But I'm sure you'll get on all right. He'll like your work and he's a good judge."

"Do you think he will? You know, now I've decided to go, I'm keen to be off. When shall we start?"

Susan relished his abruptness. "Where are we going to live?"

"I don't know. Let's go and have a look round."

She laughed at his boyishness. "You'd better go alone. I'll trust you to find the right sort of place. I'd like to stay here by myself for a bit. And — what about Henry?"

"We can take him or leave him."

"Oh, Tom, he's not sane enough for London."

"Perhaps not, though he gets saner every day. Very well, we can leave him to look after things here; one or other of us can come down and visit him from time to time."

They were now near the curve of the hill, and could see the grey wood-smoke from their home chimney blown in faint spirals over the wind-flattened tops of the beech-saplings. They walked in silence for a while, both feeling a new tenderness for the home that they were leaving. Yet, in spite of the knowledge that the most complete year of her life was at an end, Susan was glad. The change had come just at the right moment, and fresh upon this new adventure, like the first kiss of marriage, had come the thought that she was to be left alone for a while. She was very happy, and at that moment felt that she loved her husband more than she had before realized.

It was early August when Tom went to London to look for their new home. The day after he left

was heavy with low clouds. Inland the country seemed almost overburdened by green foliage, refreshed and made abundant by frequent showers. The cliffs and sea shore changed little with the seasons; they remained the same save for faint tintings on grass and rocks. A breeze ruffled the sea, and far along the coast, headland succeeded headland, each of a fainter grey than the last. Susan had sent Henry out to cut wood on the hill, and sat alone in the empty house. She tasted the sweetness of her solitude, finding it very good. It came with the quality of a surprise. There had been fairly frequent occasions when she had been away from Tom since their marriage, short periods of a day and a night, but now she was to be several days alone, — two weeks perhaps. The sound of the waves at the cliff's foot could just reach her through the still air. As she listened to their broken rhythm, it brought remembrances of her very early childhood, of travelling upon ocean-going steamers, and of her mother. Her gaze rested upon the wind-ruffled sea and above it upon the grey, frayed edges of the clouds; she began to try and link together that early childhood and her later life. Thoughts came quick and smooth, but the pattern they made left no very definite stamp. After a while it seemed to her as if life were constantly casting nets, sometimes soft gauzy veils, whose touch she loved, to catch her —. And these nets, what would they do to her when

caught? She felt she could hold them off, but they were always softly falling like snow. Now while she listened to that broken rhythm and watched the grey sea, she could catch the soft edges, divide the folds and stand free. Free? No, freedom was only for moments, only imaginary; those nets were made of stronger stuff than gauze; they were bound about her heart and held her body in their keeping. Everything that she had belonged to them, except perhaps memories. Memories — what were they? She wondered and wondered, and the broken rhythm of the waves was still in her ears.

CHAPTER II

THE flat that Tom Northover found in Cheyne Walk overlooked the river. A rickety stairway, approached by a dark and very dirty passage, led up to surprisingly spacious rooms, whose wide windows opened upon all the opalescent colours of the Thames. Tom was pleased with his find, and wrote to Susan to come and help him furnish. They had a good deal of amusement white-washing and making the place habitable. At first they knew nobody, but Tom soon brought back acquaintances from the Slade. They began to discover the different sets that live in Chelsea, starting from those young and enthusiastic souls who give substance to their feeling of emancipation by drinking rum-punch and sitting on the floor with their arms round each others' waists, to others no less young and enthusiastic who find expression in less obvious ways, and who cherish a desire for independence, without parading it as a challenge to convention. Among these latter Northover and his wife soon found themselves on friendly terms. They tasted with delight new currents of thought and feeling. A life so fresh in its hunger appealed to latent energies, blowing into a strong

flame already-kindled enthusiasm for work and self-expression.

Of their new friends, Noel Sarret was one of the most attractive. She was remarkable both in her personality and in her work. From sixteen, and she was now twenty-three, she had worked at drawing with a fairly sustained enthusiasm. She could both see and feel and was able to express something of what she felt. In her more recent work she had deliberately adopted an oriental style, borrowing her colour-schemes from the Tibetan paintings on silk which hang in the Victoria and Albert museums. Of her indebtedness to these little-known masters she made no secret. Her painting of London and Cornwall were similar, in that they shared a soft and tender remoteness from reality, and at the same time were endowed with a sharp feeling of life-hungriness. Her very modern and vivid personality was in marked contrast with the deliberately archaic character of her work. It pleased her that she could so well disguise, and, at the same time, express her emotion. In stature she was small and slight. She dressed with a simplicity that was in contrast with the often vivid and bizarre costumes assumed by fellow students. Her hair which was very thick and dark had been cut short, and when in moments of animation she jerked back her head, as was her habit, it was inclined to stand out on either side of her face, giving her a childish and untamed ex-

pression. Tom and Susan found in her qualities which from their first acquaintance had struck a quick response. Susan recognized in the open courage of her eyes an independence which was sisterly too, though more defiant and open than her own. Tom had admired the soft and yet swift quality of her work, and at the same time had felt as a challenge her poise of alert confidence. This liking was simply and unhesitatingly reciprocated. Noel came to see them in their new home; admired their spacious rooms and their view onto the river; thought them lucky in finding so pleasant a dwelling, and with simple good manners made it seem natural that she and her friends should visit the Northovers at most hours of the day or night.

Noel had of course her admirers, but in Martin Hyde she found a religious adoration coupled with a dog-like devotion which would have been tiresome had not Martin been so honest and gentle a youth. Martin was four years younger than herself. He had been working at law. Then, quite lately, with a sudden and complete knowledge, he had discovered that he must give expression to the very lucid emotions which constituted his nature. He knew as yet little of drawing, but had plunged boldly into colour, and through sheer intensity of feeling had been able to express on paper the ardent yet tender dreams of his youth. His work was at once recognized to have merit, and artists of far

more advanced technique looked with envy upon the crude, ill-drawn figures through which the soul so clearly shone.

Noel had brought him to meet the Northovers; he had been shy and clumsy, at a loss what to do with his hands or his feet or his hat, which latter he persisted in carrying about; but it was obvious that he was full of a simple admiration for Noel's new friends. On his flat, rather plain, face was a smile of honest appreciation, which eloquently said how pleased he was with the wonderful world of his youth's discovery, and in particular at that moment with his host and hostess. Northover, he thought, was magnificent, so splendid, upright and sparing of words. With an artist's appreciation he noted his swift animal-like movements. And Susan — she was young and a woman, serene and happy, married. He saw her as something beautiful and placid set in a beautiful world. He had seen some of Tom's drawings. He liked them. He was uncritical and quick to recognize any enthusiasm akin to his own.

"You must see some of Martin's work," Noel had said. They had without much difficulty won from him a promise to bring some of his paintings for their inspection. When he was talking of his work, his shyness disappeared. He forgot to clutch at his hat. Dropped it. Forgot about it. Susan was glad to find he could be so natural and free.

He came again the next day with Noel. When

they arrived, they found Tom alone, working in his shirt sleeves. He was scratching with a piece of red chalk on grey paper.

After first greetings the two men began to talk, and Noel, as always, very much at her ease, walked about the room. She at last came to rest by a window, and, while apparently looking out at the Thames, was interested in comparing her two friends. It amused her to see such unlike creatures in juxtaposition. Tom, whose bare arms and throat were tanned brown by the sun, showed a complacent self-possession in every line and movement. He spoke with the same deliberation as he moved, and his face showed little change of expression. She admired him as she would have admired some perfect and healthy animal. She felt a simple desire to stroke his brown arms and close-cropped head. Martin's hands and pale face were constantly moving. He was tremendously conscious of her observation. His pent-up nervous energy was always tripping over his diffidence, and then sliding away into gaucherie. She felt sorry for him, a little contemptuous, and then again sorry for him. He was a nice lad, but she was glad she wasn't made like that.

Tom was turning over some of his own drawings. "There's nothing here," he said. "Just scribblings. Oh, that—" (Martin had held back a leaf that he was turning) "that bunch of feathers

in space — an illustration: 'The Dalliance of the Eagles.' "

"I like that," said Martin. "You've got space, ferocity, and somehow quick movement. You ought to do lions stalking each other, or an elephant thinking alone in the forest."

Tom didn't answer directly. "There's a night scene done from memory; it's a restaurant in Dawson City. I think that's the best thing I've done."

Noel left the window and looked over Tom's shoulder at the drawing. "You draw human beings as if they were animals," she said.

"It's life without thought," said Martin, "But it's good." Tom had turned to Noel to receive her criticism. She was now standing back from the picture. "If you could put mind and soul, even passion into those faces it would be great."

At this moment Susan entered. Tom answered Noel without looking at his wife. He had been about to speak ironically, but Susan's presence gave a sudden and unusual enthusiasm to his words. "When I can do that," he said, "I shall call the picture 'Panic.' "

"And then?" questioned Susan, smiling, "will they all be called 'Panic' after that?"

"I shall then make you sit for me as some dryad of the woods," laughed Tom, "and leave you to find the title."

Martin at once pictured Susan as a wood-spirit,

perhaps as Daphne turning into a laurel tree. Of course her husband was right.

Susan blushed; she was a little annoyed. She turned to Martin: "You haven't shown us any of your work yet. But I see you've brought some with you."

Martin as he showed his painting was stiffened and made tense by love and pride, which were at once so diffident and so passionate as to make him forget to be self-conscious. He showed them first some landscapes of green fields overhung with white, conventional clouds. The pictures were alive with springtime; an awakening earth smiled with the delight of morning. He showed them small groups of people picnicking under the bare boughs of trees. The human figures shared with their surroundings a crystal virginity. They were caught from reality, set in the midst of a magic world, and they were held in odd stiff attitudes, tranced by the emotion of their creator. He showed a painting on silk of a country fair; in a vivid medley of colour the mannikins were all caught motionless in the surprised wonder of youth.

"This is one I like," he said, pleased at the silent tribute of his friends. A young nun and a man were walking hand in hand through an orchard of apple-blossoms. Green grass was under their feet, and their way led along a winding path that stretched

golden into the distance. The man, who was dressed in open shirt and loose trousers, had a knapsack on his back, as if for a journey. His face and that of his companion were suffused with the happiness of love and adventure.

"Have you a title for that?" asked Noel.

Martin shook his head.

"You might call it 'The Best of two Worlds,'" said Tom ironically.

"Or 'From Heaven to Earth,'" said Noel, and then quickly added, "or 'From Earth to Heaven.'"

Martin still shook his head though he smiled.

"You might call it," suggested Susan, "'The Magic Path.'"

Martin turned to her. "Yes, that's something of what I meant, but not all."

"'The Magic Path through the Enchanted Woods,'" said Tom, "or why not call it simply 'Out on the Spree'?" Tom had noticed the emotion with which Martin had turned to his wife, and had spoken to cover something a little ridiculous. "But who's that?" he added. "There's some one at the door."

Susan felt her heart contract with excitement. She knew with sudden certainty that it was her father. Every day she had expected, half hoped and half dreaded, that he would come; and now he was there. "It's my father," she said. She

walked quickly to the door. Martin, who was shy of showing his paintings to a stranger, shook them together and shut his portfolio.

Paul was little changed in appearance except that he was better and even more neatly dressed than usual. He looked very much a dandy and quite at ease. His greeting to Susan was a glance so rapid as to be unnoticed by the others. He saved her any awkwardness of formal introduction. "Ah! how nice this is," he said with perfect nonchalance. "What a fine spacious room! But I nearly broke my neck over your rickety stairway. Now, Tom, that you are married and a rate-payer you must not let the approach to your charming flat be mended with little bits of wood so thin that your father-in-law can put his foot through."

"If you keep to the inside close to the wall it's quite safe," said Noel, who had at once liked him.

"Thank you, I will remember," he said seriously. He now gave his hand to Tom and was introduced. Noel noticed the second look of recognition exchanged between father and daughter. She observed that they had not touched hands.

Paul took his own arrival so simply, with so little of the return of the prodigal father, that Noel and Martin had no suspicion of his long absence.

"Do not let me interrupt you," he said, "you were looking at pictures. May I look also?"

Tom showed a few of his drawings, and Martin,

seeing that Zalesky had no affectations where pictures were concerned, submitted his own for criticism.

Paul looked at the drawings, at the room, the view over the river, and at the young people all much at the same time; he talked airily about whatever caught his notice. The place seemed to him very fresh and pleasant, and after what had been the most lonely period of his life, he felt fresh and pleasant in response.

When in turning over the drawings he came on the picture of the young nun, he became suddenly interested and absorbed. He looked at Martin, smiling ironically. As he spoke, his irony disappeared and he became serious. "It's very well to paint a picture like that—very well—But remain an artist. Remember your limitations."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Noel.

He turned to her with a gesture. "Remember that an artist can seldom master more than one medium. In the medium he chooses, he lives. He sacrifices what other people call life. He has his fancies. Are they not enough for him? What does he want with life?"

"Can't he have both?" she answered, with something of mockery in her smile.

"No—not if he's an artist."

"I disagree," she said.

"You will learn that you are wrong. The world

of fancy, which can by happy accident sometimes become perfect, is apart from the material process. In imagination a man can sometimes be free. What do you say?" he turned to Susan.

"Like Noel, I believe in life," she answered.

"We all believe in life," said Tom laughingly.

"No, I used to; but not now; now, only in the beginnings of life and where life ceases. Do you not understand?"

They all laughed at his mock-pathetic manner under which he cloaked his seriousness. "No, I'm afraid we don't. We don't see it so absolutely clear as all that."

"Ah, how can I explain? Excuse me, listen to this." He went to the piano. For a few moments Paul sat in silence; then looking up at Martin he said laughingly: "Surely, it's so simple. No man can live what he imagines, nor would he want to take his clumsy reality to knock holes in his fancy."

Susan whispered to Noel, "Women are always doing that, and I believe they succeed sometimes."

"The two fuse," Noel whispered back, "but I think he's right or partly right about men, those men who are not sentimentalists."

Paul began to play. He started with a few bars of the accompaniment of Brahms' "Vier ernste Gesänge," but soon drifted off into improvising. The sombre melancholy was lost in what at first

seemed a tangle of broken emotions, out of which grew, however, a disquieting imagery of vast buildings designed in a spirit of evil, suspended over spaces in which fleeting figures hurried from fever to fever of hopeless distress. His listeners became caught in the relentlessness of his vision.

When he had finished, he looked at them with triumph. "That is the ground-current," he said.

"It's damnable," said Tom. "It reminds me of the etchings of Piranesi —. A sort of fever-dream."

Paul nodded in acquiescence.

"Yes, it's like Piranesi," said Martin, "but Piranesi is a great artist, a real giant; he's terrifying."

"I daresay, but I hate him," then turning to Paul: "But how does that illustrate your point?"

Paul did not answer. He began to play again. This time he started with an air from Stravinski's "Sacre du Printemps," but before long he broke away, and his audience felt a sharp, sweet sense of exultation, which just for a moment seemed to pierce through to a world of rapturous quietude.

"There, those are the two themes," he said. "I cannot explain any better, besides I do not want to."

"We are a little mystified," said Noel, "but thank you for playing."

Paul walked over to the window. After looking

at the Thames as if dissatisfied with anything so uncompromisingly English, he asked Susan abruptly, "Do you cook your own food here?"

"Sometimes, but there's a little restaurant almost next door where we get a good many of our meals."

"You'll stay and sup with us," said Tom, "and afterwards we are all going to the opera. Will you join us?"

"Thank you, I'll take supper, but no opera."

"Then stay and talk to me," said Susan. "I'm quite glad of an excuse to stay by this nice fire."

2

After they had supped at the little restaurant, Paul and Susan went back to the flat.

"Susan, don't ask me questions," he began, as soon as she had lit the lamp. "I'll tell you in time. . . . Ah, it is nice, this place. I am glad. . . . You seem happy. Tom is a good, simple fellow. I like him. But that young Martin. . . . He is an artist. That girl is nice too; at one time she would have fascinated me. I like her independence, it is a challenge to any man."

"Martin is in love with her."

"No, he is not. Not yet. He is in love only with his fancy. . . . She is intelligent but she is not enough for him. Besides, that sort of boy would be terrified by her passion; but there is no danger of that."

Paul had sat down on a couch and was looking at Susan, who had shown in a quick and unguarded glance her affectionate interest. He suddenly felt a wave of happiness — happiness not due to the assurance of her love, but because he was now certain that she had not yet known love. That tempest had never shaken her soul. She was serene in the midst of life, like a flower gently swaying in the breeze. Ah, how happy she was! He picked up a book to disguise his sudden rapture.

“What, you are reading Balzac?” he questioned. “‘*Splendeurs et Misères des Courtisanes*.’” . . . Ah, how he exaggerates . . . but what a fine sense of living! He has the imagination that has lived. To have sympathy and understand, a man must have been everything. In some life or other Balzac has been a courtesan. What we call imagination, I think, is remembered experience. It would be good if every one had been through that stage. All saints I am sure have known it; else how could they know purity?”

“Do you believe then in reincarnation?”

“Believe. . . .” he fingered the word and, as if disliking it, let it drop “I think it is probable . . . a good assumption.”

“Tell me what you mean.”

Paul checked before launching into his theory. In the pause he decided to speak about himself.

“I have come to the end of my madness . . .

of desire. It is as if my life were finished. I have found out everything about what deceived me. I have come to the end. . . . I am ready for something else. Life is like a wave . . . of what? . . . shall I call it spirit? which only when it reaches its limit becomes material, tangible. We are following its movement, but when we can grasp and hold, the thing has become dead . . . solid in our hands. Well, for me all that stupidity is finished. I had to learn by the longest way. I know now that this that people call love cannot be grasped."

Susan looked at him with eyes full of a love that seemed to enfold them both in its happiness. A happiness which, even in what Paul called his madness, he would not have tried to grasp.

"But tell me about reincarnation," she said.

"Well, perhaps we live to satisfy our desires. By experience we learn imagination which is also sympathy. One life is not enough; our experience is so slow."

"I suppose the pity is," she smiled, "that people don't always know what they want."

Paul made a movement as if he were going to speak, then checked. After a little silence he said: "How quiet it is here. How delightful. I am glad you are come to live in London for a while."

"Tell me, where do you live and what do you do?" asked Susan.

"Oh, I live not so very far from here . . . by

Addison Road, but perhaps I shall come nearer. I give lessons, as now I like to have my own money." He shrugged his shoulders as if rather in apology. "But that does not matter much. I also play for my own amusement and sometimes for pay. Are you surprised? But truly, Susan, I have found out that what one does matters so very little."

"What happened to Hilda?"

"I do not know, she went away. . . . Let the dead bury the dead or find their own resurrection."

Susan was silent, then after a pause she asked: "Do you think there is responsibility between people . . . a sequence of actions . . . obligations?"

"A mistake can never be made good. A success cannot be spoiled."

"And reparation?"

"It is always inadequate, but still one sometimes does the illogical for one's own sake." Susan waited in silence for him to continue.

"About those jewels," he went on abruptly. "I should like to pay back."

"To send money was rather a mistake. Can't you send the things themselves? Could you trace them?"

"Perhaps . . ." he broke off, asking Susan of her impressions of London. They talked too about Swaystead; just touched on Susan's marriage and on Caroline.

"Is she happy?" asked Paul.

"Yes, quite extraordinarily so. She's very much changed," added Susan. Then, smiling, she said, "I sometimes feel that she loves Richard almost too much."

Paul nodded. His heart sang with joy that Susan was not yet caught in that net.

CHAPTER III

I

IT is fortunate that a great number of the dwellers in towns remain unaffected by the psychology of the industrialism which has caused towns to spring into existence. These people live in towns as foreign adventurers. They are not conscious of the sound of the wheels by which the system moves, and their position is frankly one of independent self-gratification. They are not necessarily selfish, but they go their way light-heartedly, taking what the town offers, and, if they are not actual pirates, it is owing to some lucky accident that money has found its way legally into their pockets. They do not feel the weight of the town, they have it beneath their feet, and in that position it is not surprising that they feel some contempt for its muddled stupidity. On the whole they meet it in a friendly mood, which is usually reciprocated; for the town is glad to find that not every one is oppressed by the same weight that is upon its own spirit. Young people, those who come young to the cities and are allowed to remain young, are of this class of adventurers.

The Northovers and their friends did not understand London. Their imaginations had not yet

been touched by the multiplicity of its hollow streets. It was to them like some large forest to be explored, laughed at, enjoyed, appreciated and perhaps rifled. It was rather a silly old thing, muddy, but with a sense of humour. They liked it chiefly because a good many other adventurers gathered there. The cafés, restaurants, theatres were meeting places.

Northover though rather affecting to despise what stood to him for London life, enjoyed it a good deal, and was anxious that Susan should taste and appreciate with him the bright, gay glitter of its nights. There was one restaurant in particular which he frequented where other adventurers also gathered, a small highly illuminated spot surrounded by the vast native gloom of encircling London.

And the excitement of London had not yet begun to pall, although they had lived there for more than a year. Life as an adventure was too urgent to allow of ennui. There were gaieties in the form of theatres, dances and supper-parties; these not so frequent, however, but that they made a contrast against a quite substantial background of endeavour. Noel often came with them. Susan particularly liked her. The two young women respected each other's independence, and the hidden fount of courage they divined in one another. Noel combined toughness of spiritual fibre with delicacy of perception. She had the assurance of one who had never doubted herself. Susan had learnt to love her for her upstanding

youthfulness both of spirit and body. Tom found in her, as any man must have found, a challenge and a stimulant. She always made him feel quiet and alert. When she was with him, her independence became for her always a little self-conscious. She was glad she cared so much for her art, was so happy in finding an open passage of expression. They were like friends, who coming from opposite banks of a stream could meet upon a bridge of hard good-humour.

2

They were all a little flushed that evening, pleasantly excited, and were feeling very gay. The lights of the café seemed exceptionally brilliant, and the miscellaneous throng seated at the little rather squalid, marble tables seemed an excellent assortment of alive and responsive human beings. The champagne that they drank was also excellent. Tom, while he filled up their glasses, spoke with unusual vivacity and excitement.

"Yes, mathematics is the most exciting of sciences. The whole of art is merely one of its expressions, composition its derivative. . . . Think of the imaginative wonder that veils a logarithm."

Noel, who felt alive to the very tips of her eyelashes, caught responsively at the idea. Her vitality, deep-centred in her body, radiated out a controlled and happy excitement, that was too tranquil to be called vivacity.

"It is certainly deeper veiled, more in repose," she said, "than the number it represents."

Susan was watching her husband, amused and pleased at his excitement, pleased too at the brightness and movement of the café. "It is so long since I thought of mathematics," she said. "What exactly does a logarithm mean?"

Tom paused, then letting his thoughts race, "Literally the word of a number, the name or symbol of a number, the symbol of a symbol. That sounds exciting, doesn't it?"

"Perhaps the reflection of a reality," suggested Noel.

"Or the reflection of a reflection," Tom capped her.

"The height of the sky seen in the depth of a pond . . . and yet existing on the surface. It is stiller than a number," she said.

"Yes, a number moves in powers, a logarithm in simple progressions. It is more remote."

"What do you suppose to be the logarithm of an emotion?"

"Or thought?"

"Or a wish?"

"A hope perhaps is a logarithm itself," said Tom, emptying his glass. . . . "What nonsense we are talking! But why not? It is, of course, the appearance behind the appearance, what foolish people who have not drunk enough champagne call the truth . . . but . . ."

“ ‘ Big logs have little logs upon their backs to bite
’em

And little logs have lesser logs and so *ad infinitum.* ’ ”

“ Tom, you’re quite tipsy and absurd,” said Susan, coming back from far-away thoughts that she had sunk into.

“ Artists,” he went on, “ use nothing else, they progress, they never really jump.”

“ And consequently,” said Noel, as if taking up a challenge, “ they miss life, or at any rate part of it.”

Tom looked at her questioningly.

“ They miss always the nearest experience,” she continued, “ the most spontaneous expression. . . . Do you remember Norbert’s cry against artists: ‘ We’ll be the thing they look at. Let Rubens there paint us! ’ ”

With animation Noel met his glance across the table. Her face was flushed, her lips parted, her eyes dancing with the mixed ferments of champagne and intellectual excitement.

Tom looked at her with what might have seemed a cold critical stare. He was now suddenly sober, and his calm was to conceal the hot beating of his heart. Noel averted her gaze and coloured deeply. In a moment she had become filled with panic and delight, resentment and joy. She looked at Susan, who was again far away with her thoughts. She

was at Swaystead listening to the sea and to the murmur of the woods, wondering about symbols and reality. How evasive, how meaningless words could become!

Susan looked up at the bright lights of the café. Round each table were small groups of gay people. There were Slade students, men and women, artists and artists' models, and here and there some of those successful figures of the moment whose names every one knew. There was little Rotheimer with his fat pretty model, Chesil Smith, with his dandified little moustaches, drinking champagne and flirting; and then of course the great Cobbold with a bush of hair standing out a foot behind his head. As he moved from table to table, the eyes of several young women followed him expectantly. The pageant of all this buzzing life seemed suddenly very unreal to Susan. They were absurd shadows, neither numbers nor logarithms. She noticed that the air was intolerably stuffy and choked with smoke; the pleasurable feeling of a few moments before had left her. She was longing for Swaystead, the cliffs' edge and the wild thrift. She looked up at Noel's flushed face; and Noel, seeing nothing but vacancy in her eyes, felt annoyed, ashamed, and yet pleased. Noel looked back at the throng of laughing, drinking people. How she loved them, and how she loved herself. . . . Her wonderful mystery of a self . . . her intelligent brain, her beautiful smooth body un-

der her silk clothes. But she too needed the air, the air of the night that reached up towards the stars. She wanted movement to whisper to her of the mystery of her own flesh. She wanted above all things to be alone.

Outside, where there were crowds of people passing, she found that the world was as enchanted as she had dreamed in that wonderful moment of joy. She knew that to Tom as he walked beside her silent and lithe, those passing crowds were as fantastic, and yet as real, as much a part of the mystery of his perception, as they were of her own.

She spoke to Susan as they crossed the road. But Susan seemed very remote. Noel suggested that they should walk towards the park and take the underground at St. James's Park. Never before had she felt London to be so exhilarating. It seemed as if the secret and complex lives of all the people in the crowd composed some vast, interwoven web, which by its own elasticity swayed, contracted and expanded, and upon which her spirit was dancing. She felt that she had become simple, transparent . . . never before had she been so obvious to herself.

On the little bridge over the artificial water in the park they stopped. The stars were reflected and blurred in the gently moving undulations, the rumble of London was forgotten.

"Oh," said Noel, shivering, "it's ever so late,

let's get home; but how beautiful this place is at night. It's like the wildest country." With the shiver at the sight of the starlit water had come the feeling that somehow she had stepped through the elastic web of human life and was now groping in the darkness for herself, not sure of her footing.

In the underground, Tom sat next to his wife. Noel had taken a place further up the car. Twice he looked up at her and knew that she was conscious of his movement. He had no doubts or misgivings, but was filled with wonder that life had so suddenly blossomed. In the past he had always found Noel unapproachable, but now the barrier was slipping down. It would fall inevitably. The concealed things of life were moving, and their movement sent through him a thrill of elation. There was no question in his mind but that he should take up the new challenge. The thing was inevitable. It would develop as leaves expand in the springtime. And Susan? Well, Noel was different from Susan. The relationship would be different. All human relationships consisted in giving and receiving. To his straightforward view of life no reason appeared why blessings that come as gifts should ever turn to fetters. He was enough in harmony with nature to know that every leaf needs time to uncurl from the bud; and needs the smile of the right season.

When they reached the embankment, Tom and Susan parted from Noel, who would not allow them

to walk back to her rooms with her, as Tom had suggested. When they reached their home they were surprised to see lights in the windows, and as they entered, Martin, looking very pale and tired, rose to meet them. "I'm awfully sorry," he began nervously, "being here so late. I came in much earlier, found you were out and thought I'd wait; and then," he added rather lamely, "just went on waiting."

"You poor boy," said Susan, "then you've had no supper?"

"Oh, well, that doesn't matter."

"It just does matter, sit down and I'll give you something to eat. You foolish boy, you are looking awfully tired. You'll knock yourself up if you don't eat. We'll all have something. It's quite chilly enough for us all to enjoy some cocoa and it doesn't matter if it is late. I'm glad you kept the fire in."

Tom, who liked Martin considerably and liked him too for his half admiration of Susan, saw that he had come on some special errand. "Well, what is it, Martin?" he said, smiling. "Have you been drawing something?"

"But before you show us you must have some food. When did you have your last meal?"

"Oh, I don't know, I was painting. I didn't think of eating."

"That's just what I thought. Now sit down and

feed. No." Martin had made a movement towards a package lying on the divan. "We'll look at them afterwards. I want to make the cocoa now and get warm."

Martin sat down and did as he was bid. When he had finished, they all drank cocoa.

"May I see the paintings now?" said Susan. "I wanted to see them ever so much, but I just *had* to feed you first. You really want some woman to look after you."

Tom laughed. "Yes, poor old Martin. It's rotten living a lonely life; I've tried it, and I know."

Martin was already occupied. At the corners of each of his paintings which were on wood, he had arranged little blocks, over which were stretched sheets of tissue-paper; these he was now removing. "You see they are not quite dry," he said.

The paintings were all of the same type; groups of conventionally posed girls clad in bright garments on a background of gold. Their gestures seemed to have been caught by the artist, and frozen in the very acts of movement. He had caught them at the crest of their rhythm, had said, "Stay," and had held them. But for the delicacy of his intent, it would have seemed almost an outrage thus to portray the passion of their innocence.

A faint tinge of colour came into Martin's pale cheeks as he watched Susan's appreciation.

She turned to him, her eyes moist with emotion: "Oh, Martin, they are the best you've ever done. They are beautiful."

Martin blushed with pleasure and laughed. "Well, they are all for you if you'd like them."

"Oh, thank you, Martin," she said quite simply. Then, after a pause, "but you must keep them for me. for a little bit because I'm going away to the country . . . to Swaystead . . . tomorrow. I felt this evening ever so strongly that I wanted to go to the country quite by myself, now Martin's pictures settle it; they tell me the same thing that I had already felt in myself."

"For how long are you going?" asked Tom, who was looking at her gravely interested.

"Oh, not for very long, a week . . . two perhaps. I don't know. . . . Thank you so much, Martin. Your paintings are beautiful, and they have come just at the right moment. While I'm away," she added, "you promise to feed yourself properly. I shall tell Tom to look after you and see that you eat enough."

"I'm all right," said Martin, pleased at her concern for him. "And . . . I'm sorry to have stayed so awfully late. I believe it's past two. And, oh, I'll leave my paintings. Remember they are not quite dry. Good night," he added abruptly.

"I'll light you down stairs," said Tom; "they are

dark and broken in places. Susan's reprobate father usually manages to put his foot through them."

When Susan was left alone, she went to the window and looked out into the starlit March night. She was happy, but without any exultation. She was glad to be going away. She was enveloped in what seemed an easy contentment. After standing a few moments at the window she went back to Martin's pictures. While she was looking at them, her husband came in. "Yes, they are damned good," he said, "and in a curious way they are like you in spirit. The boy's falling in love with you, of course."

Susan coloured slightly, nodded and frowned, and finally smiled at Tom, though she said nothing.

"But what gets over me," he continued, "is that he does such damned good work. It makes me envious. I can't touch him." He looked at the panels. "Such cleanliness and strength! He's the best of the lot of us. We're all out of it."

"Oh, you've plenty of cleanliness and strength," said Susan, looking at her husband approvingly. "But he's got a curious gentleness . . . a perception of spiritual freedom that is rare. It is as if he saw a way of deliverance from life . . . an escape."

3

Noel had not gone straight home to her rooms. She had waited in the shadow of some trees until

Tom and Susan were out of sight, then she had walked out onto Battersea Bridge. In spite of the wind being very cold, she stood looking at the water for half an hour, then with a characteristic shake of her head she straightened herself and began to walk home; she knew that she had made up her mind. She was quite sure she knew what she was going to do.

The next morning her purpose was even more firmly defined; had it not been for the warmth with which this purpose burned, she would have been depressed. As it was, she did not think of happiness or unhappiness, merely of action.

She knew that Tom would be out that morning and that she would find Susan alone, but she had not expected to find her packing.

"Yes, I am going away," said Susan, "just for a short time. I made up my mind last night. Now that the spring is coming, I felt I must be in the country. It will be lovely at Swaystead." Susan's smile was so full of happiness that Noel felt that she had never loved her so much before.

"It was last night *I* decided to go away," she said, laughing.

"A sort of spring migration must be in the air." Then on an impulse and looking straight at Susan: "May I come with you?" Susan paused and coloured. "Oh I see, you don't want me?"

"Noel, dear, I'd rather have you than anybody.

But now . . .” Susan laughed. “I am running off to be alone. You understand?”

“Yes, of course. How happy you are! Susan, you know you make me envy you tremendously sometimes. Well, I’m going right away from this dingy old town, and I’m not coming back for ever so long. I have just telegraphed for rooms at Zennen and I’m off tomorrow morning.”

“Then you must be just as happy as I am,” said Susan, “I feel I want to dance at the fun of getting away. I must have been wanting to go for weeks, but I only discovered it last night.”

Noel had become abstracted; she was not listening. “I am taking my painting things. I mean to work and do something really good before I come back.”

“I’m sure you will,” said Susan. Then, after a pause: “I wonder if your work sets you free in the way I sometimes imagine?”

“In a way,” said Noel with sudden bitterness, “it gives me life at second-hand. . . .” Then she smiled. . . . “There, you see how London has got into my blood . . . making me say silly things like that. . . . You should see the cliffs down at Zennen. They are wonderful. It’s not like England at all. I’ve never felt so young and free as there. I’ve got all sorts of people to say good-bye to. I came to you first. Give my farewells to Tom. I’m going up to Hampstead this

afternoon, and shall stay there the night with some friends. I'm off the first thing tomorrow morning."

When they kissed good-bye, Noel embraced Susan with a new and almost passionate affection. And as she went down the stairs, she whispered to herself, as the tears gathered in her eyes: "Oh, how happy she is, how happy she is!"

CHAPTER IV

IT was bitterly cold when Susan reached Swaystead. In the cart that was waiting for her the driver was muffled up to his ears against the east wind. "You better wrap up warm, Miss. It will be rough going over the top of the down." As he spoke, the wind sent stinging against their faces particles of icy dust. The horse put his ears back and shifted uneasily. Susan climbed up into the cart, pulling her wraps close round her. They drove for a while between hedges of hawthorn. The swollen buds, waiting for the spring that must so soon come, made a haze of pearl where they faded into the distance. Later they drove through beech-woods bare of all but a few low-growing leaves, which still clung brown and wrinkled to the boughs. The upper twigs and branches lashed against each other like pieces of steel. The life in their thin and lenticular buds was still deep hidden. Here and there a squirrel appeared and disappeared among the branches, or, like a piece of blown fluff, leaped over the frozen ground. In spite of the cold, Susan was conscious of the sweet scents and the benign influence of the country. She loved the last grip of the winter which would give to the spring a sudden triumph. As they climbed the chalk-track over the down, the

country northward spread before them. There was the river winding among the water-meadows, now splashed with ice pools, there was the heath and the brown heather, which took a blue shade from the cold grey sky. But behind the crystal covering of frost, Susan could feel the warm enduringness of earth. Life was more enduring than any semblance of death, and her heart was alive with fluttering hopes. The wind was so cold that she had to put her head down against it, and breathe into a little space made between her collar and her hands. From the hill-crest she looked eagerly for the sea. It was there to the south, grey and shivering, flecked with foam, beaten by the wind. The contours of the downs moved in smooth modulations, tempting the eyes to follow the subtleties of their folds; and there over the copse of beech-saplings was the blue wood-smoke of her home.

Henry had prepared an enormous fire of welcome. Blazing logs stretched across the whole eight feet of the hearth. The flames were reflected from the white walls. He had hot cocoa ready, of which the driver was invited to take his share. Henry was a little troubled by the stranger, but as soon as he'd gone, came back and smiled a shy welcome. He never spoke very much, but seemed to enjoy listening to what other people said. He listened to the account of Susan's journey, rubbed his red hands together and grinned.

The cold held for three days, then on the third night, exhausted by its own intensity, withdrew northward, driven by a howling south wind. The next day, when the wind dropped, all the birds and the plants knew that the spring had come. The frozen places of the earth remembered their violets and their snowdrops; mosses gleamed with sudden vividness, and the small leaves of honey-suckle and elder flushed a deeper green in the sun. Susan walked along the track that runs down the crest of Hindon towards the beech-woods. On the outskirts of the wood she stopped to look at the little grey lichens with their forest of tiny upstanding cups, and there, just beyond, were some scarlet Pezizas. Violets grew among last year's dead leaves. She knelt down to see them more closely, and then, yielding to an impulse, lay down, hiding her face in the sweet-smelling debris of leaves and mosses. As she lay there her heart beat faster, and, after a little, she began to cry from an unexplainable happiness. She lay there for a long time, and when at length she lifted her face she knew with certainty what had been before but a vague trembling hope. New life was kindled within her. Her happiness was complete. She was a vessel consecrated to the holiness and beauty of life.

She walked on into the wood. All the things and the dear associations of her youth were there, but they were curiously changed. She was now one of

them. They had no power to terrify. She was like themselves, deep-rooted in the earth. Life surged up from the hot depths of earth and filled her. She stood among the silent trees, conscious of her kinship and her equality. Tears of gratitude ran down her face.

On the way back towards the house she met Mad Henry. He had been out picking flowers. He beamed at her and offered the small bunch of violets he had in his hand. He mouthed for a moment as if he were going to speak, but finally said nothing and shambled away looking in the grass for more flowers.

"He has been through a complete circle," thought Susan. "He has been outcast and mad, has feared and hated men; now that he is an idiot, he lives just for the service of others. He loves the flowers and the birds; I think he must be nearly as happy as I am."

2

The east wind, which had lashed the beech-saplings at Swaystead against their usual weather-bent, was blowing in icy gusts through the London streets when Noel started on her journey. She had lived for the last few hours concentrated upon the purpose of her flight. All her emotions, which she guessed could easily become turbulent, were held within the small compass of that purpose, giving it an additional force. When she was at Zennen, she told

herself, she would have time and place enough to let her personality expand, and there determine the balance between pain and satisfaction. For the present she could take pleasure in the cold wind and in the faint excitement which she always experienced in starting on a long railway journey. But it was with an excitement that had in it nothing but pain that, as she reached the platform, she saw Tom Northover. He came towards her with his usual grave expression, which she knew covered so much vital energy.

"I came to see you off," he said, "but I thought you must have changed your mind. I was just leaving. You know you have lost the train."

"No!" The word betrayed the panic that seized her. "But it's only five minutes past eleven. The express is at eleven twenty."

"Eleven o'clock. You must have looked in last month's time-table; there's been an alteration."

She recovered herself and again clutched at her purpose. "O damn," she said, smiling. "Well, I shall have to go by the next."

"That's absurd; it doesn't go till four o'clock and doesn't arrive at Penzance till midnight. There'll be no means of getting on."

"I don't mind, I shall go to the hotel, and go on tomorrow morning." She saw the faintest smile at the corners of his eyes, and her pride rebelled at the thought of his suspicion that she was running away.

"But why be in such a racing hurry?" he said smilingly. "You had much better wait till tomorrow and go in comfort. Besides it's far too bitterly cold to hang about here for five hours. It's all very well you and Susan both getting this spring flurry for the country, but why choose the middle of winter? At least let's get into a waiting-room out of this howling draught."

"Oh, Tom, it is annoying. I do hate being thwarted in what I've set out to do."

"Yes, I know." Again she suspected the faintest smile. "Still, this is a dismal sort of place to wait till four o'clock."

"Very well, I'll go tomorrow. It doesn't make any difference, only I hate changing my mind when once I've settled on a thing."

"That's much more sensible," he said, as he took charge of her bag.

Again her purpose gave a struggle of protest. She had no right to be with Tom. She wanted to avoid him. Oh, how much she wanted to get away. But what excuse could she make? How could she possibly avoid him? They were such old friends that it would be absurd for them not to travel back together. He was talking of Susan's departure on the day before and of the cold. Noel suddenly felt numbed and hopeless. She felt sad with the sadness of an old woman, and an overmastering desire to let things be arranged for her by somebody else.

In her sadness was mixed a bitter melancholy. She thought of Susan happy at Swaystead, believing that there, with her friend, she could have escaped from her sense of isolation.

Tom had called a taxi and she had got in, feeling that any protest would betray her weakness. She was cold and disheartened. She was also ashamed of being glad that he was there to arrange things for her.

At first she was pleased with the quick movement and the comfortableness of the conveyance; then all former emotions and aspirations seemed to fade away and to leave her alone with a feeling of faintness and sickness. Tom was silent. He seemed to be enveloped in an atmosphere of his own, by which she was both attracted and repelled. She did not dare look at him, but she knew that as usual he was grave and alert. She wished at first that he would speak but later was glad that he kept silence. She leant back muffled in her wraps, and closed her eyes, but a moment later was trying to find interest in the things that flashed by the window. She could not shake off the feeling of sickness, and by the time they reached her rooms she was shivering.

Tom carried her bag in. "Why, Noel, there's no fire and no lunch, and, you poor girl, you are looking thoroughly chilled. It's lucky I'm here. I'll soon put things right." His words broke the spell of her misery. She was relieved that he could be

so commonplace, and that he seemed so little conscious of any strain.

Tom soon had a fire blazing. The stove was in full blast and he was preparing a meal when she returned from taking off her wraps. "Help me to find the butter; and where do you keep your jam?"

She felt a momentary bright pleasure at their being occupied so simply together, but it did not last, for now she knew that he was conscious, and had been conscious all the time, of her intended flight, of her excuses and of her weakness. She wished too late that she had refused to let him stay, but wondered how she could have contended with the unnaturalness of sending him away when she had neither fire nor food. She tried to persuade herself that when the meal was over, he would go, and that tomorrow she would be free; but the deeper self of her senses told her that escape was no longer possible.

When they sat down at the table, she found she was not hungry but only cold. "I don't want anything to eat. I'm going to sit by the fire. Bring me something warm to drink."

If only he would speak now, her resolution could hold out; but he would wait, her strength would go, and she would be powerless. In spite of her dread of him she found a delight in his presence and his quiet movements. She was in a trap from which there seemed no escape, and felt the sickness of a

trapped animal. Why had this malady, so unexpected and so sudden, come to humiliate her pride, and to destroy the confidence of her independence? A dark other self was rising mysteriously in her heart, impelling her forward to meet the mystery confronting her that seemed at once so tender and so hard.

After she had finished drinking, she still held her empty cup as if it were a kind of protection. Tom was silent. In a moment he would come to her. If only he would move. At last he came and took her cup from her. She shivered and edged nearer to the fire. Tom stood beside her for a few moments, then bent down and took her hands in his.

"Oh, Tom, don't touch me, let me go," she pleaded, hardening her hands against him. Then with defiance: "I love Susan far more than I love you." Her defiance gave her courage to look up and meet his eyes. She saw reflected there her own animation. She knew that he desired her the more for her struggles; yet his calmness was unbroken. The pressure of his grip seemed to draw her life away from her heart through her hands.

"But what has Susan got to do with us?" he said. "Can't you clear your mind of those old stupidities? Because I love you, it doesn't mean that I love Susan any the less. You are different. The love between us will be different. She would be among the first to recognize it."

"Do you mean that you wouldn't feel any different towards her?"

"Yes."

"Oh, women aren't like that," said Noel with a shiver. "Tom, let go my hands."

He released her hands and sat opposite her on the cushions by the hearth. Noel met his honest kindly eyes that seemed to be always a little amused, and knew that she loved him beyond all prejudice.

"There are two sorts of morality," Tom was saying. "There's the sort that starts with a lot of fixed ideas, with human relationships more or less codified and put into pockets with right or wrong written upon them. This kind is fixed and rigid; it seeks to subject life to itself. It is constantly renouncing life without the right to renounce, mutilating it. The other believes in the acceptance of life, and believes that morality is only a developed kind of sincerity, something that follows upon experience and develops by experience. Its only test is the sincerity of the emotion. If body and mind and soul are involved and one is ready to make any sacrifice, then that thing is good."

"But you sacrifice others," said Noel. "Susan is my friend. I can't bear it."

"Susan would not wish for any artificial restraint. She could not do so without hurting her own freedom."

Noel looked at him half credulous for a moment.

"No, it isn't as simple as that. Women are more complex. I'm going right away. I love Susan too much to make her unhappy."

"Why be so afraid of unhappiness?" he said and paused.

Noel crouched nearer to the fire. She was beset by forces from without, and by others that rose within herself. Happiness and the ordered ideals of men, what did they count? Man was fashioned by life. His happiness was a flame. The flame must be kindled, must be allowed to blaze; what matter the ashes?

"It is the old futile story," Tom continued, "of moral inhibitions sprung of fear. Most people are so afraid of life. We are all much more afraid of life than we are of death. How can a trustworthy morality possibly grow unless it evolves from experience? Morality must always *follow* experience. Even if we are unhappy, how can it be helped?" As she met the straight glance of his eyes, her heart was convulsed and she again trembled. She closed her eyes in order not to seem so hopelessly bewildered. "I was brought up in the old morality," she said. "I still believe in it."

"Only a little bit of you," said Tom with assurance. He again took her hands, thrilling her with the delight of his touch and of his mastery. Only for a moment longer did she struggle, then met his

kiss with all the wonder of her youth and her virginity.

"I forget everything," she whispered; and might have added, "I am become new made. Make me all over again, and with your aid I will discover life. I forget everything else."

CHAPTER V

I

DURING ten days of exceptional spring sunshine, Susan remained at Swaystead. She had no inclination to read or stay within doors, but spent her days wandering by herself, sometimes over the smoothnesses of the downs, sometimes through the beech woods and sometimes through the meadows in the valley, or through the fir copses and among the heath and gorse. She found a simple delight in the slow bursting-open of buds and the unfolding of leaves. Her contentment was for a time without any desire or wish, but gradually the deeper secrets of sex which are late in revealing themselves began, like the young leaves of the springtime, to throw off their dark covering. Susan felt a new comradeship for her husband. The flame of the growing life within her sought for the nourishment of a maturer love.

She wrote only a short note to Tom telling him of her intention to return to London. She had no inclination to write of the complexity of her feeling, but believed in a closer union which would grow in their common hope for her child. It was not for long that she meant to leave Swaystead. She would return with Tom. In this spring weather it would not be difficult to persuade him to leave London.

When she opened the door of her home she found a scatter of letters on the floor, her own among them. There were no fires burning, and the rooms had the feeling of being uninhabited. Susan went down the outer stairs to where the doorkeeper lived. Mrs. Joyce was a taciturn old woman with a rather dour countenance who made a favour of working by the day for Susan and her husband. Today she was looking more than usually sour and depressed. She answered Susan's enquiries by saying without any waste of words that during Susan's absence her husband had not been living at the flat. "Though he's called for letters once or twice," she added with a grim suspicion. After a pause she said: "The foreign gentleman's been here too." Although she knew of the relationship, she could never bring herself to call Zalesky anything but "the foreign gentleman." "He was wanting to know whether you'd come back; and young Mr. Hyde's been round here pretty near every day."

Susan was puzzled though not troubled by Tom's absence. She was a little amused at his having kept so quiet about his movements. Mrs. Joyce regarded her with a pitying kind of hostility, then, relenting, offered to come and help light some fires "and get the place a bit warm and comfortable."

When they were upstairs, Mrs. Joyce remarked: "The country seems to suit you. You are looking very well."

"Yes, it's lovely at Swaystead. Look, I've brought some flowers." She held out a bunch of primroses and violets.

Mrs. Joyce sniffed at them with the faintest smile, reversing as if with difficulty, the natural bent of her features. "I see you pick plenty of green leaves. That makes them look so nice and natural."

"You silly old dear," said Susan, giving her a friendly shake. "I'm glad you can smile at something. It's nonsense you pretending to be so depressed on a lovely day like this."

Mrs. Joyce's smile deepened. "Well, I must get on with my work," she said, suddenly remembering herself.

When she had finished tidying and dusting and had left Susan a bright fire and a room into which the spirit of life had returned, she hurried off to do the behests of the foreign gentleman, who made her promise that she would inform him at once of Susan's return.

Half an hour later Paul knocked at the door. "Ah, my dear Susan, so you have returned." He came towards her with his hands out. "The country must be lovely. You carry a reflection of it in your face."

Susan laughed, pleased. His flattery made him absurd and loveable. "It's you town-dwellers who only see the light of day by reflection. But tell me: what has happened to Tom?"

"Oh, Tom! Tom's all right. He must look after himself for a minute. Listen to me. I have been dying to see you and have so many things to tell. To begin with I have been working more hard than ever in my life. I have done something that really pleased me for the first time. Yet it does not please me altogether. It is not complete, but so nearly so as to excite me with hope. Like life, it is beating against its limitations. It has life's darkness and longing, the mystery of its roots, the secret movements of its snakes and caterpillars and some of its aspirations — the opening of a flower that is not yet open. But the flower will open, believe me. Now listen. Let me play to you. Afterwards I will tell you all about everything."

Susan was accustomed to her father, but guessed that there was something behind his egotism. His manner was not quite natural. It was a little overdone. Still she was accustomed to bending to the first onrush of his enthusiasm, and was anxious to hear what he had produced. He sat down at the piano and began to play. At first the tangle of emotions puzzled her, later she began to discern what he had called the striving of the roots and the caterpillars. The dark mystical side of life was there unfolding, yet always beating against limitations and thereby finding its development. The theme grew in strength. It became lit by hope. Pure flashes came out of the darkness, but were only

flashes among waves of obscurity in which the whole was folded. Paul broke off. "That is the first movement," he said in a hard voice. "Now I shall tell you: your husband has gone away with Noel. They have discovered love for one another." He at once began to play again.

The theme of the first movement was reconstructed from a new basis. Instead of the threatening imminence of veiled forces there was a harshness of distress out of which grew a beauty trembling with happiness, that feebly broke, as if seeking but never finding its culmination. Paul lifted his hands from the keys. "That is where I fail. I can get no further. Perhaps one day I shall discover." He came towards Susan, who was gazing into the distance. She did not move; she hardly seemed to breathe. He spoke to her with great tenderness. "You have courage, I know, and though life break us in pieces, the spirit endures." He bent down and kissed her hair. "I shall come back," he said, "and you will then tell me whether you would like me to be with you."

Left alone, Susan remained motionless for a long while. She was astonished and made dumb at the crashing in pieces of her happiness. Pain like a thick liquid began slowly to insinuate itself among the débris, until every crevice was filled, cementing the whole together in aching misery. She began to walk up and down the room, then, oppressed by its con-

finement, went out into the street. She took no notice of where she was going; it was a relief merely to move her limbs. In her pain her desire was to get away from herself. She walked on without purpose and without hope. Late at night she found herself in a far distant part of London; then, with the instinct of some tired animal, she turned homeward.

In the studio she found Paul waiting. "At last you are come," he said with relief. "You look terribly tired. Dear child, you must lie down and rest."

Susan made an impatient gesture, as if she already found the room too narrow. She walked to the fire; "Very well, I'll rest; only I'm cold."

Paul persuaded her to lie down on the divan. "Don't talk, father," she said, "just let me be quiet."

After an hour she sat up. "I'm all right now. You must go home and get some sleep. I won't go walking any more, I promise."

He looked at her with a queer smile. "You must rest for your own sake, however hard it may be."

She caught the intention in his words, and looked up with a quick flash of comprehension in her eyes. "Yes, I will rest, and . . . I have known, since I have been away at Swaystead, that I am going to have a child." For a moment her restlessness gave place to a satisfaction deep-seated in the sense of motherhood. Paul's memory swept back to the

early years of his marriage and to Susan's own birth. He was struck by the change that had come over him since then, and feeling that all barriers were, at that moment, down between him and his daughter, kissed her with a new-found simplicity. "Ah, Susan," he said, "how much you teach me."

When he had gone, the restlessness of her pain returned. She lay upon her bed moving uneasily. Questions were always crowding upon her. Why? Why? Why? And Noel had said she was going away! That could not have been a deliberate deception. Tom she could understand; he was like that, but she had never expected this logical development of his nature. But Noel she could not understand. If only the questions would cease, perhaps then she could rest; but a struggle was within her whose pain could not be gauged by any of her former experiences.

During the next days she became accustomed to the suffering, but at times it would rage so fiercely that she had to hold herself rigid, trembling under the lash. She hated to be so restless and unsure of herself. When she was with others, she longed to be alone, and when alone she wanted company. Her father was with her several hours every day; once he brought a message from Tom.

"I have been with your husband," he began. "For me to understand him is not very difficult." Paul saw that Susan was sitting tense and still. He

went on quickly: "We are alike in one way, he and I — I only just see this . . . in the way that we can smash our passage with such style and success through the lives of other people. Tom has the strength of a robust conscience. He is so sure of himself and the rightness of his instinct, that he does not comprehend that you can suffer more than from a readjustment of ideas."

Susan, her pride touched, looked up quickly.

"Of course I said nothing. He wants to see you. I understand very well how he floats upon his own happiness and success. I told him you were with a child. He was gravely interested, very pleased, I think, and wanted to come and see you. I had difficulty in persuading him to wait; I said you would send for him when you wished to see him."

"I don't want to see him yet," said Susan. "Did you see Noel?" she added with a just discernible flinching over the name.

"Yes, she is become full of her new love, is shy and sensitive. She is bewildered; her happiness burns too fast. I have seen women in that condition before. She will be afraid of you. She has not Tom's conscience. I am sure she suffers."

Again the recurring flood of questions pressed upward, but they found no utterance. Susan felt that she was slowly sinking under the rising waters. Very soon she would be willing to forget even that inner essence which was her truest self, if only she

could forget her pain and could escape the dark images of fear, that now so often fluttered in the emptiness of solitude.

2

For a week after her return Susan remained indoors. The weather had been wet and gusty. There was no inducement to go out, and she shrank from the possibility of meeting either Tom or Noel. Martin had called, but she had seen him only for a short time; his too obvious sympathy had made her reticent. There was nothing that could profitably be discussed, and Susan shrank from touching upon that veiled and secret life of a past happiness for which his paintings had stood as a symbol.

After a week of continuous drizzle, the sunshine came back. However unhappy one may be, it is difficult to ignore spring sunshine. Susan had been expecting Paul, but instead of waiting for him she had an impulse to go out alone. She crossed the bridge and went into Battersea Park. Close to a small fountain which played into a stone basin, she sat down. She was alone except for one old gardener, who was pricking out seedlings into a bed opposite. Thrushes were singing, and in the distance children were playing under the trees. For some time Susan watched the sunlight on the moving wisp of water and on the broken surface of the pond. She saw the

drops fall and rebound, and then run as perfect little spheres over the surface. As she watched, strange and utterly new emotions rose within her, as if from some hitherto undiscovered well of force. She was conscious with a suddenly awakened vision of a world of crystal-clear happiness. It was rising with a gentle strength, enveloping all her senses, and with its first wave washing away her pain. The crystal calm deepened; and she was able to sink down, becoming lost to all ordinary consciousness. Vaguely, and yet with an exultant sureness, she was able to touch and thrill responsively to the deeper currents of nature's movement. Cruelty and pain lost their terror, becoming merged in the purpose of growth, a growth which passed all limitations, and which continued beyond. The lower manifestations also had their continuance; they were interwoven one with another, finding their significance not in themselves but as part of the profound waves in which they were enveloped. In that strange happiness she could understand the perfect relevance of the narrow limits of instinct. The lives of insects and worms held each their perfections. The revolutions of the spider's ball of eggs, supported by its mother in the sun's rays, was, equally with the revolution of the planets, part of the universal manifestation of happiness.

Out of the crystal depths there came visions of

scenes long forgotten. Lives of the past lived again at the points where they had found eternity and sunk into the universal oneness of being.

She remembered herself first as a girl clad in rough skins. She was sitting on the high branches of a tree. Beneath her a herd of wild swine rooted among dead leaves. The sun was slanting through branches; it chequered the backs of the herd in gold and black patterns. She could smell the strong odour of the swine and could see the curved tusks of the boar. She noted his quick irascible movements. With a heavy sensualism he mounted one of his sows. The girl was thrilled with the fierce intent of that primitive union. The herd rooted unconcerned among the leaves, then moved on, into the forest. The sunlight still lit the branches, and here and there were tufts of grey lichen.

She knew herself as a woman. She was standing outside the door of a hut. Young children were within, she could hear their voices. It was late twilight. A wide sweep of downland rose before her and swept away into the distance. A star was bright in the deep purple of an autumn sky. A flock of sheep in moving rivulets streamed down the hillside. They converged, forming a grey fan-shaped mass. Their bleating reached her in sharp cadences. The figure of the shepherd, who was her husband, appeared upon the sky-line. There was a sudden hush

in the air and the sheep were silent. In the silence she heard a fox bark.

Visions quickly succeeded each other, some, like wisps of vapour, left no trace, others were more enduring. Once she was sitting crouched in the corner of a squalid room. Men and women with oaths and cries were breaking down the door. They were coming to kill her. At length the door gave way. She rose to meet death. Later she remembered walking through sunny gardens, and the clasp of a lover's arms, and for a flash the woods at Swaystead. She saw a vast, bare stretch of grass-land; rooks were feeding. She called out, scaring them; they rose and wheeled close to the earth, all their wings slanting at once, catching the light. Then there were sunlit hills and behind them a pillar of white clouds rushing up into the sky like a shout of laughter. In each vision ecstasy set her free, gave her new birth, deliverance from space and time. Eternity was a deep wave of bliss.

When Susan found herself again looking at the fountain and the sunshine, she saw that the gardener had finished planting out his barrow-load of young plants, and that many people were walking about in the park. She still felt extraordinarily calm, though weak and a little sick. It did not seem possible that such calm should fade; she was beyond all accidents. The old question of having or lacking confidence had

disappeared; loss of confidence was no longer to be regretted. Life had bestowed upon her its freedom. The limitations had fallen away. She thought of her husband and Noel, and loved them. She thought of her child.

Then again she thought of Noel. She must go and see her. The false veil that was between them could not possibly be allowed to endure.

For some time she remained looking at the fountain, whose thread of twisted water rose to break and fall, scattering tiny spheres each with its gleam of light. People continually passed to and fro, they were enjoying the sunshine and seemed almost to reflect its spring brightness. Children screamed and shouted, playing games under the trees and round the stone basin. Life, Susan thought, was something very much more simple than she had imagined.

CHAPTER VI

UP into the light of love's discovery and to the depths of amazement Noel had travelled. She knew herself more truly than in girlhood, yet had lost the personality she had been accustomed to call herself. She was no longer isolated within the battlements of her own comprehension. Her new spiritual form, twin born with her love, desired only that entity formed by love's union. The passional elements in her nature had inspired a new fusion. Her spiritual protoplasm, moved by instincts deeper than her mind could fathom, enfolded the mystery of karyokinetic symmetries. Her lover was also changed. Life had at last threatened to break his proud isolation. His independence trembled and bent. Noel's arms enfolded him with a mysterious warmth which had the power to melt and fuse again the elements of his nature. Yet he would not wholly surrender; much, nearly all, he could offer to his passion, but there remained something that was also himself, critical, grave and amused. Noel was never able to forget that he had been married to Susan; perhaps, with her, he had understood the calm serenity which the soul embraces, perhaps it was only his egoism with which

Noel contended? She could not know. Whatever he had experienced with Susan, a different life now enmeshed him. With Noel he knew the restless delight of the heart — restless, yet often on the point of finding rest in a mysterious beyond, which, though it could be held for a moment, was fugitive as physical desire.

Noel was unhappy in her happiness. She was not satisfied; and although she knew that she possessed more of Tom than any woman had yet possessed, she feared that part of him would be always outside her grasp. And Susan . . . ? The thought of Susan was sometimes an agony. She loved Susan, yet at times her jealousy drove her to hatred. She hated Tom too, for she knew that he had no thought of renouncing his claim upon his wife. Besides these personal and conflicting passions, there was the accumulated weight of tradition. This, which ever grew in Noel's sight, gave forth a hateful emanation; sometimes it seemed to separate her from her friend, leaving her in bitter isolation.

She knew that one day she must meet Susan, and dreaded this meeting. Susan's silence terrified her. She feared Paul's visits, hating him for his reticence and his perspicacity. Why had she become so open to attack? and why was she so unjust to Paul? He was kind, she could feel his sympathy. Was the possibility that he *might* be able to injure her love sufficient to arouse antipathy? How unlike the be-

ing whom she had been accustomed to think of as herself.

Noel was alone in the studio. She was idle, and looking at a pastel drawing of herself that Tom had made the day before. It was only a rough sketch, but Tom had managed to put into it that strange animality of which he was master. He had captured all her fine voluptuousness, and had set in her eyes something of the pain of love. She was pleased with the drawing. It was a good, strong piece of work. She was pleased too at his vision of herself, at his partial understanding.

Susan, on her impulse to see Noel, had come direct to the studio. She had found the outer door open and had walked in. When Noel heard her knock she thought it was Tom returned. She called to him to enter; when she saw Susan, her confusion was complete. The burning thought which swum above the momentary tumult, was to hide the drawing. She made a movement forwards, but Susan was coming towards her. She abandoned the thought of concealment and turned to meet Susan.

Quite suddenly the complex of confusion, secretiveness and shame disappeared; the evil-smelling mass of convention and tradition which had been rearing itself between herself and her friend was there no longer. They kissed quite simply; then — Noel could just remember her earlier self sufficiently to be astonished — she began to cry. And, most

wonderful, Susan was comforting her. Her pain and unrest could at last find its outlet; Susan would understand. It was strange that, in the arms of her friend, she should find the calm which even the fulfilment of passion had denied. There was no need for words. For a few moments they were blessed with the assurance of complete comprehension. Noel learned in those moments a new meaning of self-surrender. At length she looked up, shaking her head and dabbing the tears from her eyes. She saw that Susan was looking at the picture of herself.

"How beautiful you are," said Susan. "I see he has made you happy."

Noel blushed deeply. "Oh, let me cover myself up, please." She turned from her task with her cheeks and neck still flushed. "I can't quite bear you to see me yet." As she spoke, one thread in her brain wondered if Susan felt no jealousy or envy. But how can she be jealous of me? answered the humble conviction of her soul. Still that little fugitive thread continued its question throughout their conversation.

Noel made her friend sit down, and sat opposite her by the fire. She did not speak for a few moments. When she did, she frowned, finding expression difficult. "I did not mean ever to deceive you. I wanted to go away; that's why I wanted to come with you. I tried to go to Zennen, but Tom met me at the station. I made some feeble struggles.

They didn't count. I'm changed now, made of different stuff. Yet, Susan, I love you more than I love him." She was flushed with the strain of her resolution. "I could go right away."

"But, Noel, that would be stupid. Renunciation at the wrong time can be as wrong as anything else. I didn't see this at first. I was weighed down with all the stupid beliefs of how things ought to be." She paused, then added: "But in your love don't lose too much of yourself."

Noel gazed at her friend in wonder. A few moments ago she had suspected that Susan might envy her; now she herself felt a pang of envy. With hesitancy, as if speaking but newly-formed, uncertain thoughts, she said: "I am not young enough not to be restless, or to believe in things remaining as they promise, but . . ." she left her sentence unfinished. Susan did not speak, her eyes told Noel that she had understood. After a pause, she asked, "Where's Tom?"

"I don't know, I was expecting him any moment."

"Then I'll wait and see him. You know he wanted to come to me, only then I didn't want him. He doesn't understand women very well. He is so occupied with himself and yet so intelligent. It's partly what makes him so attractive. I should like him to feel (not that I suppose that he doesn't feel so) as wild and free as he was made to be."

Noel again looked at her friend with a puzzled

amazement. "I wonder if you are very much older or very much younger than I am? But the real wonder is that we *can* understand one another."

When Tom returned to Noel's studio, he could not at once hide his surprise at seeing Susan and Noel together; but in a moment he recovered his usual poise. He nodded to his wife: "Ah, Susan, I am glad you have come. How well you look — simply radiant. I wish your father could see you now. He has been suggesting quite a tragedy, looking worried and thin and strumming no end on his piano and everybody else's. Perhaps he has told you: he is going to be a great musician. There are times when I believe him."

Susan spoke to Noel: "My poor Paul, I'd forgotten all about him. He must be waiting for me."

"He'd given up waiting. He'd had no lunch, and not knowing where to look for you had gone round to Geoffrey Strott's, where I met him. He's promised to come in to tea, so may be here any time." Tom was talking to make time. He felt a little afraid of Susan. He was not sure whether she was angry. Women were at times confoundingly difficult to understand.

Martin, who had entered close behind Tom, was less able to hide his surprise; he was not able to accept so easily Susan's unexpected presence. He feared that she might be hurt in this strained interview. This fear did not last long. He saw that

she was happy. How she had become so was a mystery, but, as Tom had said, she was radiant. A reflex happiness welled up in Martin. He went to her without any attempt to conceal his delight: "I'm so glad you've been out." The words in themselves were inadequate, but they conveyed all his simple-minded delight in her recovery.

"Yes, it was lovely. I wandered about in Battersea Park. It's wonderful how wild some of the enclosed places in London can seem on a spring day."

Tom, who still felt very uncertain of his position, was anxious to start a general conversation, behind the safe cover of which he could make observations. Noel had given him no clue. She had hardly looked at him. "Go on with what you were saying, Martin." Then — to explain to the others — "We've been round to see Strott. You know what a fellow he is for talking about patterns that are purely decorative and have no suggestion of representation. He was well wound up this morning and talked, full of his theories. Poor Paul couldn't stand it, and went off swearing. . . . Martin was just going to point out to me where he was wrong — Strott, I mean — when we came in."

Martin was not in the least anxious to talk. All his interest was centred in Susan. He wanted to discover what had happened. He had a flash of intuition: of course to be happy was to be good. He

remembered that some one had written that no goodness that was not happy was good enough for God. Well, that was perfectly plain.

"Yes, do tell us, Martin," said Susan. "I've always been interested in Strott, and never quite able to meet his arguments."

"I don't really know anything about it," Martin began. "I don't agree not because of argument but because of prejudice. I see things one way clearly and am probably blind to others. You know Strott maintains that colour and form that are not representative of anything in nature are best able to express — well, whatever he wants to express: that artificial poise that I suppose the artist tries for, a kind of vibration of a beyond that produces the aesthetic emotion." Martin began to warm to the subject he had entered reluctantly. He became half conscious that in its development it might bear upon Susan. "Of course I know he'd put that differently. I'm bad at explaining things. To me it seems the privilege of the artist to be able to hold still in a crystal form the flowing material of existence. He creates an artificial stability outside nature. By checking the movement of things he is able to isolate a moment or an emotion. Of course its non-material growth and intent is not checked — it is emphasized — by this isolation. We see in the work of art more clearly than in the bewildering movement of phenomena this spiritual extension," Martin paused.

"We agree roughly," said Tom. "But Strott maintains that he can get as much of this precious emotion from a non-representative pattern as from anything else — or more. He almost made Paul ill with exasperation by saying that the pattern in a carpet could be as great an artistic expression as Handel's 'Messiah.'"

"I agree with Paul," Martin continued. "Surely the relative value of artistic productions is gauged by the *amount* of life to which the artist can cry halt. No one can arrest more than a small current of the great stream. Pattern and colour alone have limitations, and I believe that the human figure, without having any of what Strott calls literary associations, can symbolize emotions — all the complex emotions of our development — that pattern alone cannot give."

"Then is the *amount* of this life stream, you speak of, the criterion of value?" asked Susan.

Martin paused uncertain.

"Of course it is," said Tom. "We are all after it like earwigs after honey; but it's so damnably evasive. We grasp it when we're lucky enough, when we can."

"It's sometimes rather contradictory," said Noel.

"You mean different people want different parts of it."

"Or one person wants contradictory parts."

"You are right," said Martin, looking at Susan.

"Mere amount is not a criterion. It's easy to get muddled; one's own subjective sense interferes, and that is responsible for half one's criticism and all one's preference."

Susan was going to speak, but she heard Paul running up the stairs. He followed quickly upon his knock, but checked abruptly, surprised at seeing Susan. He gave a short laugh. "So this is where you come and hide from me? I've been waiting for you, and waiting. I had no lunch." His manner showed a suppressed excitement. He was quick to note some change in Susan.

"Now that you've found me, you must make up by having a good tea." He saw her distinctly wink at him. Just the faintest wink, but unmistakable. It bore a message. He felt like Harlequin who had forgotten his part and to whom Columbine had curtsied. Ah, that world of fancy! Where was his wand? He had lost it. No, there in his hand, and more real than all appearance of reality. He felt he could bend the delicious thing into an arch, and bring it down whack, whack, whack. Columbine would dance. For a moment he felt the quest of his anguished search kiss him and fly past.

"You've just come at the right moment," said Tom. "Tell us whether the value of an artist's production is governed by the amount of life he is able to capture and there crystallize?"

Paul looked at him with a serious eye: "As the

donkey said to the horse, It's a matter of temperament. . . . And that reminds me. . . . Apropos . . . a story: There was once a lady who lived by the side of a lake. In the winter the lake was frozen. Across the ice, every evening at five o'clock her lover would come to visit her. Always she received him with gracious smiles, strengthened him with a hot meal, and afterwards comforted him in her own warm bed. They were happy; and in the morning her lover would strap on his skates and depart over the ice.

"Once, after the sunshine of the spring had begun to thaw the ice a little, they spoke of the summer and of the flowers and the birds; but the evening wind chilled them, and they returned to the comforts that the lady had prepared.

"The next day the sun shone brightly, and in the evening her lover failed to come. On looking out of her window the next morning, the lady saw a hole in the ice, and, in the middle of it, a fur hat. Through the spring she was left solitary. But in the summer she forgot the ice, and by the association of ideas almost forgot her lover, but not quite.

"The water in the lake was now the clearest green. Sometimes in the evening at about five o'clock, she would sail in a small boat. The boat had a purple sail for mourning and she wore a yellow hat for contrast. They made lovely reflections in the green water. And as she sailed on the sum-

mer evenings, she forgot altogether her lover and his skates and the ice and even his hat.

"When she had sailed to the other side of the lake . . ."

"What did she do then?" asked Susan.

"She danced and played games."

"Who with?"

"With herself. And when she was tired she would lie on the warm sand and remember how that in remote time the priests of Isis worshipped a virgin mother. Ideas of that kind, she thought, must be deep planted in the souls of men. She remembered that the Phœnicians believed that to burn their God kindled his divine energies. Was it a divine or a demoniac madness, she questioned, that inspired the priest Attis to self-castration, that with the coming of violets the dead God might be resurrected . . . Now, Tom, do not ask me to talk any more nonsense. But, if I must, I prefer my nonsense to Strott's. . . . I am hungry, pleasantly hungry. It is delightful to miss lunch — the fast before the festival. How much we lose by ceasing to observe the rituals of religion. I hope you have a good tea for me, Noel."

"Would you like an egg?"

"Two if it will be forgiven that I sacrifice two symbols of the resurrection."

"I also must have one," said Susan, "I likewise have had no lunch."

Tom could see that there was some kind of joke between Susan and her father. They were both greatly elated. He was bewildered to know what had happened. Susan was unaccountable. He felt nettled by Paul's frivolity; moreover it was aggravating to think that in such a short period of absence, Susan had evaded him. It would be consoling if he could believe that she was acting; as it was he was troubled by a sense of her remoteness. A suspicion flitted through his mind that he had not completely appreciated his wife, and that her quality might be more difficult to capture than the throbbing warmth of Noel's affection.

During tea, which was very gay, they were all affected by Susan's high spirits. Paul talked nonsensically about the joys of hunger, the good conscience waiting upon good appetite — mere frivolities that could skim over the surface, leaving small impression.

When Susan was leaving, Tom asked her: "May I come and see you?"

She gave him a friendly smile, but her answer was to Noel: "Of course you must come." The "you" included Tom, but he felt all the bafflement of the male in conflict with that female evasiveness which he can so seldom understand.

Outside there was spring twilight and a colourless sky. Thrushes and black-birds were still singing though the smaller birds were already quiet.

The cold of a coming frost held the air motionless. For a while Paul and Susan walked along the embankment in silence. Paul felt the need of speech, but found the ordering of words difficult. "I think, Susan," he began, "that there are men who are born with an intense desire, with a necessity, to find in women, not only their natural complement, nor even the gratification of the thirst inspired by the growth of their own ideals: they seek to find in the feminine that essence which is the opposite of all their restlessness, a static poise, the wonder of virginity, which promises a beyond of rest and beauty. Nature and it are seen by them through the tinted glasses of sexual perception. Their aesthetic life is a flame springing out of their sensuous being. I am such a man. Other men find their liberation in other ways, but to me it has always been women. You know the vanity of my search. I had attained nothing, understood very little. I had discovered the emptiness of passion, and, although I worshipped my ideal in the form of women, I learnt to despise my God. I desired always possession; I could not behold. . . . But today, dear child, I have accomplished my search. I have beheld and am free."

Susan placed her hand on her father's arm. Her touch was a caress. It was the first caress that she had given him since the very early days of her childhood. "I shall do some good work now," he said simply.

CHAPTER VII

I

SUSAN spent most of her summer in or about London, and Paul, rather wondering at himself, developed a sense of duty towards his child that had been absent towards his wife. In this Martin was his rival, Martin was happier than he had ever been. He was in that state of youthful happiness when all the past, and even the future, seem of small importance; they were forgotten in the glowing venture of the present. Sometimes there were wonderful days of happiness that he could spend with Susan. These were joyfully accepted without question whither they might lead.

Once in early June, in the midst of that period when springtime melts into summer, he suggested that they should make an expedition up the Thames. He was going for a day's painting. He would start very early, at five o'clock; would she come with him?

They arrived at the inn at Whitchurch in time for breakfast. In the garden the hawthorn was still in bloom and the first roses were showing their buds. The day promised to be glorious. They soon had their boat and Martin began to pull up stream. At first they talked of the splendour of the morning

and of the flowers that they passed and the few people that they met. This was so obviously the time to be about, when other people were still rubbing their eyes or having breakfast. Martin asked about her childhood; he wanted her to go right back in her memory and tell him of her very early childhood and India. Susan was pleased to tell him, feeling very young in her reminiscence. She told him also about her father. Martin would be young and generous enough not to spoil things by rigid judgments. He confessed to being puzzled by Paul's flight from Swaystead. It seem so monstrous to take things; but then he had paid everything back. "To Paul it must have been especially difficult," he said, "he would so hate any conscious gesture."

"Yes, he did; he felt, of course, it was so useless. As it was, it was like burning incense to some old dead God. Still the act had humility. He did it quite on his own, and, of course, sceptically."

Martin considered Paul's conduct in silence for a few moments, then he said: "Tell me about your sister. What happened to her?"

"She was married before I was, and since then I have seen hardly anything of her. Her husband, I think, keeps her very much to himself. He is rather the possessive type of man. He doesn't think we are very reputable and perhaps we are not. He has been anxious to make Caroline into the orthodox wife. He never could stand Paul — thought him

a disgrace to fatherhood and all that sort of thing."

"And what did Paul think of him?" asked Martin amused.

"Oh, father thought he was a prig; but he's really quite nice in his way." Then as an afterthought: "But he really is stuffy, one of those people who want life to be tight and safe and regulated. I'm often sorry for Caroline, and wish I could get back to her."

"How does she get on with him?"

"Oh, she's devoted — very happy indeed. He's quite the best of husbands," said Susan with that faintest wink that Martin found so adorable. "I heard about a month ago that she had had her second baby. It's strange to think of one's little sister as the mother of two children." Susan paused a moment; then added, "I think she has got rather a binding kind of happiness."

Martin considered for a little. Then very gravely and with a simple seriousness that in its naïvete could not be misunderstood: "It must be very strange having a child growing slowly inside one, and to feel it grow. I can understand it a little bit. It must be like having an idea for some splendid picture. . . . And then it's so wonderful that one day there are two people instead of one. I remember, when I was a boy, I used to keep guinea-pigs. You know guinea-pigs are born ready-made. They have fur and their eyes are open and they can run

about and eat the day they are born. Well, I remember how entranced I was when the little ones were born. I was thrilled and astonished." Then he added as if as an afterthought: "And of course babies are so much more wonderful than guinea-pigs."

Susan laughed: "To us, perhaps, but not to Mrs. Guinea-pig. I expect her little ones seem as miraculous to her as ours to us. . . . One has, as never before, the feeling of continuity. And, Martin, the beauty of it is, it is such a common miracle. It makes one so much a member of the human race. It shows one one's own place."

He had a quick glimpse of her in her new-found position as a woman. How remote she was, yet how wonderfully near and human. Then in a second flash he knew that men as well as babies could be born of women.

He was fully conscious from that moment that she had become the significance of his life. Not that he then learnt to shape his love into hopes or fears. These did not follow till long after. For the present it was enough that he could kneel in adoration before the inspiration of her completed womanhood.

They had reached some open meadow-lands. By the river's edge were occasional clumps of willows, which sometimes stretched into small copses, following perhaps tributary streams. Beside one of

these Martin brought the boat to the bank. They stepped out among the long grass and flowers. Before they had walked far, Martin found a subject and set up his easel. Sunlight was slanting through young willow leaves, beyond was a background of flat fields and a wide sky. Susan was walking away by herself, when he called to her. She turned, a little surprised at his sudden shout. "There, stay there like that, and I'll put you in. Do stay. I won't be long. Stand just like that. Don't move."

Susan laughed and stood still.

Martin, lost to everything — even to Susan's consciousness of him, worked on. He forgot how long he kept her standing, though he noticed, half consciously, that she put out a hand for the support of a small tree. Susan found it easy and pleasant to stand breathing in the fresh morning air. She noticed on the leaves and the grass-blades the tiny insects and caterpillars that grew and moved. They were so calm and unhurried that the meaning behind their existence seemed almost comprehensible.

At last Martin looked up to recognize her again, smiled and relaxed. "Come and see what you think," he said. Susan looked at the picture of herself that he had made but did not speak. He felt her approval and said, smiling: "I also have my 'Primavera,' you see."

"Will you give it to me?"

"Of course."

"No, I should like you to keep it, but don't show it."

"All right."

"You do manage to see things, Martin, things, I think, that ought to be kept secret."

He nodded, then with a gesture towards the sunshine and the wide sky. "Let's go for a walk and get up a tremendous appetite for lunch."

"A little walk," she said, "then will you row again? I like the sound of the water."

The day passed pleasantly, perfectly, Martin thought; even the journey home in the train was as perfect as a train journey could be. Their fellow passengers all looked happy, and the stuffy old train seemed to forget everything but that it was carrying in its box-like compartments, portions of summer towards the town.

They found Paul waiting for them. He was very much excited. "Ah, Susan, I have been composing, and am now tired, but I have captured what I want. It still needs much work, but in the autumn I shall give concerts of what I have produced. You will hear then, but till then I shall work by myself."

Susan also thought of the autumn. She felt thrills of hope and joy; her old familiar fear was also dimly present. This time it was not upon herself that his shadow fell.

2

For the first time in his life, Tom Northover was deeply divided in purpose. He resented this division, which was as yet in process and not complete. Noel was the dream of his young manhood come true. She was the woman of instinct, beautiful and fresh. Her passion could so enfold him that everything was forgotten. But when memory returned he reacted towards his earlier freedom. He remembered, and all the more vividly for the contrast, the free happiness of his mind, his clear friendship with Susan, his absence of jealousy or any fierce lust of possession, his joyful acceptance of her calm beauty. But now with a real anguish of spirit he feared that Susan had escaped out of his reach. In those few days of absence she had deserted him. Yes, it was she who had deserted him. He had only stepped aside to find additional riches by the way, but she had deliberately left him, had become so far distant that she could no longer hear his language. If he could have discovered in her any bitterness or vindictiveness, he could have hoped to recover his old footing; but there was none.

Several times he had been to see his wife, and each time had come away feeling chilled and perplexed. He found a slight consolation in telling himself that after her child was born she would perhaps be different; but this reasoning did not carry any conviction.

In his exasperation he tried to believe that she had cast him aside. No, that wasn't exactly it; she had let him go without any regret, almost without volition. But love for him—? It could not have died. *He* still loved *her*. Why should his love for Noel make this difference? It was a separate thing, absolutely apart. He wondered. . . . No, it was not so separate as he had imagined. He also was changing, and needed Susan's help if he were to hold possession of his former self. Surely they had all the past as a bond, there was nothing that she repudiated. She was not in the least artificial. . . . Yet there was this outstanding fact: he was no longer her lover or her husband.

Twice, when he had been to see her, he had found Martin. He had tried to feel jealous but had not succeeded. Martin was a nice boy, hopelessly in love. Tom couldn't think what Susan was going to do with him; but as a rival he didn't exist. It wasn't that Tom was incapable of jealousy: he was jealous of Noel, fiercely jealous of her past, jealous of what he imagined her future might contain. Was it then impossible to love two women and be at peace? They were so different, why should they exclude one another? He was puzzled. The complexity of his situation could not be analysed. Life was carrying him on its stream. What was so painful and exasperating was that his desires flowed in opposite directions.

There were times when Noel taught him to know very well the meaning of hatred, moments of rebellion when the bondage of love seemed a curse and negation, something that destroyed his power to work and to live free. He found it increasingly difficult to concentrate. He was often restless. With Noel he was constantly experiencing small crises. After each he would find himself a little less master of himself.

Once he had an impulse to crystallize his emotion. He made some rough sketches of tropical jungle forest. In the thick undergrowth between the knotted trees and streaming lianas were to be figures, barely discernible in the blackness. Through the branches of the tree-tops, a bird was beating its way, and here and there, from creepers and lianas, tiny monkeys hung high up questioningly. He saw the whole as the subject for an etching, and started on the work with enthusiasm.

While he had been living with Noel, he had shared her studio. At first they had tried to work together, but they had found it increasingly difficult. There did not seem to be space in one room for their separate expressions. One morning when he was working at what was to be a finished drawing, Noel came in. She didn't speak nor even look at his work, but settled herself near the stove, occupied with sorting and arranging the contents of a chest of narrow drawers. For a while Tom worked on though he

was restless. Then he stopped working, paused for a moment, crossed the room. For a little while he stood beside her. She did not look up but was motionless. He bent over her, placed his hands under her arms, so that her breasts were cupped in his hands, then, forcing her head back, kissed her mouth. For a long kiss he held her, then drawing back, looked with intensity into the wonder and pain of her eyes. How easily he could see there the quivering of her soul. Her soul was like a hot, red wound. In its aching depths was life, naked and exposed. Her mouth too was like a wound from which he might drink the same mysterious joy. She was a creature open to his touch, defenceless. The substance of life was there pulsing in her body, there for him to drink. He knew that she suffered; her pain was like a cloud which enfolded them both and enabled him to press the closer. It made her tenderness softer, deeper. Again from her parted lips he drank the stream of her passion.

When he released her, she whispered: "Tom, I love you too much. I don't want to love you so much, let me go . . . please."

He stood up letting his hand rest for a moment on her hair, then walked to the window and stood looking out. Noel remained sitting where she was. She was now relaxed, the stream of life had left her. When at length he turned, she lifted an eager though rather wan, face. "Tom, I wish you'd take me

away. I've grown to hate London. Take me right away to the country."

He did not answer at once. "What good will the country do? We shall not be able to work any better there than here." After a pause he added, as if complaining, "I never guessed I should love any one as I love you. You change me, make me different. I can't work."

"Love is like a disease," she said. "Tom, take me away from here. If we were alone together in the country we might be happy. We *would* be happy." She smiled with a sudden hope.

"If we were alone I think I should grow cruel to you, Noel."

"I don't mind what you do."

"Why do you want to go?"

"Away from here we'd be less restless. That which is different in us would not be so pronounced." She was tempted to plead: "If you love me, take me away," but to that her pride could not fall.

"We can go away for week-ends if you like," he said, "but I don't want to leave London. There are interests I don't want to drop." Then, shaking his head, "Away by ourselves I don't know what might happen to us; we had better stay here for a bit."

Noel rose and came to him. "If you would only trust me, Tom, I'm sure I could look after us both."

He shook his head. "You see I don't quite know

where I am, and I want to find my own way. Not that I don't trust you. I know how straight you are, but I've always been able to see where I'm going. . . . I want to see now."

"You know nothing of trust," she said coldly. Then, after a pause, "With Susan did you always know where you were?"

"I have believed that if one goes straight at things and shows no funk, one will come out safe and clean on the other side. I have lived by that sort of principle. It was so with Susan. We went straight forward, ready to accept. But Susan never moved me as you do. She never made me feel jealous or cruel."

"But she gave you peace; you were able to work?"

"Yes."

"You still want to see her; you believe. . . . No . . . you don't understand what's happened to her."

"No, I don't quite."

"She has escaped you, she'll never come back. Her life is there rich and full. But it flows in a different channel. She has escaped the humiliation of love."

"How does she manage to do it?" he asked with a smile.

Noel's brows contracted. "You must give one of us up. You can never love two women at once."

"Why not? You are so very different." His eyes were candid, and had no suspicion of insult.

She was hard with anger as she turned from him. "I shall leave you, I cannot bear it."

"Noel, come back," he said impulsively. "I never knew what love was till I loved you." With a swift movement he had seized her, and she was in his arms, weeping bitterly. Had she then used her scant victory, he would have yielded and gone away. But she had none of that ignoble quality that can seek profit in victory.

CHAPTER VIII

SUSAN'S daughter was born in September. If Susan had earlier had a glimpse of the underlying simplicities of life, her baby now revealed the undercurrents of its mystery. Her child was the child of her hope and her freedom. The infant movements of arms, legs and mouth, the curling of fists and toes, filled her with that joy which before, always impersonal and removed, she had found in the expanding of leaves, the opening of flowers and the rare silences of spring days. Because of her baby she could be submerged in the oneness of life. She was radiant from that bath, and sometimes in the delight of holding her child to her breast, she felt as if her flesh had become transparent, and as if with little change it would be possible to lose identity and be merged in the overwhelming oneness of bliss, which is eternity. Then, looking down at the puckered, wise little face and feeling the soft movements, she would experience that wild rush of delight which leaps, free and individual, back into personality, would feel the kindled life glowing in her arms, and know that in the form of her child was not only a consecration of all the past, but the promise of unguessed futures.

When Tom had come to see his infant daughter, she had returned his gaze with a gravity rivalling his own. He found it strange to realize that he had contributed to her making. He had held out a finger to the child, and then, noticing the beauty of Susan's hands, had remarked on them. Then he had asked: "What are you going to call her?"

"I should like to call her Maisie, it was one of my mother's names."

Tom sat down beside the bed; then, speaking earnestly and as if perplexed, "Susan, you remember when we met in the wood after I'd been away, that time you were frightened and I told you something about going through and facing life, there being no way of escape? Well, I'm somewhere back in that wood, and I have to go on but I don't quite know where I am going. The arrangement of life seemed easier then than it does now. But I know that I have got to go on."

Susan made a movement of comprehension. "It's like this," he continued. "What I feel for Noel is different from anything I've felt before. I love her, and that . . ." he paused a little uncertain. "It hasn't altered my love for you."

"It has altered things, Tom, and that can't be denied. We are separated now; but we have separated without any loss of friendship."

He was silent, frowning, for a moment. "Well,

call it separated, if you must . . . but whatever I do, and I don't know where I am going, you will not ever mind my having my interest in this little daughter of ours."

"Of course not."

"Perhaps it was stupid of me asking that, but there seems to be an artificial system of forfeiture, and I no more want to give up the child than I want to give up Noel or you." He had spoken almost like a spoilt child, but recovering himself added, "Susan, I wish she would come and see you . . . but she won't. She is unhappy and full of things I don't altogether understand. . . . But I can't talk of her. . . ." He stood up and stooped over the child. "But this little creature . . . all that is simple enough." He smiled at Susan, who was arranging the clothes about the baby's neck, exposing the little chin. He bent and kissed his daughter; then, as his eyes suddenly filled with tears, he straightened himself. "I shall come again, lots of times, but now"—he held his wife's hand a moment, "I must go."

Susan nodded knowing his hatred for any manifestation of emotion. "Be sure you come again," she said, then remembering Noel and catching mentally a glimpse of her unrest, she half regretted the words. But what else could she have said? Her words were so much an expression of her natural feeling towards Tom.

2

"It is surely a curious thing," said Paul, "that only now, when I am a grand-father, should I come to realize my own children."

Susan was back in her old rooms, and Paul was looking at Maisie who lay in her cot with a look of surprised inquiry in her eyes. "I was glad to see Caroline again," he continued. "You know that I have never seen either of her children before. Well, I will make a pilgrimage to see her first-born. Tell me what is he like?"

"A nice healthy boy."

"And Caroline herself, how she has changed!"

"Yes, she has changed."

"I have been a bad father to her. As a little child she had a serious curiosity, which was like that of some wild creature. That fellow, Richard, he's an ass. Poor Caroline had been quite tamed."

"But she is happy."

Paul shrugged his shoulders. "She has the kind of happiness that is a blight."

"What do you mean?"

"The happiness which finds itself in stability and safety, with the closing of doors, the acceptance of the orthodox, in fact, in the loving of that fat-head, Richard, and which later will find itself in the taming of her children." He paused, then added with emphasis: "Happiness can become one of our

curses. It is one of the worst snarers of the soul. It is the father and mother of smugness."

Susan laughed at his seriousness. "I won't have you call my sister smug."

"Didn't you feel you were separated?" he asked, unconvinced.

"We both had babies to be proud of, and that I should think was a bond of union."

"In spite of that didn't you feel you were separated?"

"Yes, a little bit."

"After she had left you, she made some pathetic little speech about the pity it was that you and Tom were separated. 'How sad' . . . as if she could not see. . . . Oh, my God!" He broke off. "That is all that fat-headed Richard. It was then I understood that I had been a bad father — And, then, Susan," he added, looking at his grand-daughter and speaking more gently, "it was then that I loved her most. The poor child was so bewildered, as if she were remembering something. Yet for her to see the stupidity of Richard would make her unhappy."

"Women can blind themselves to a good deal of stupidity in their men-folks. It isn't often they make friendships."

"And friendships," he said, looking at her intently, "are never safe, never secure. There's no

hoops of steel nonsense. They are too rare, too plastic to be safe."

Susan winked at him, laughing: "Dear father, how analytical you are. It's your remaining stupidity."

"A masculine aberration," he said, smiling. Then, as he rose and walked to the piano: "Will your infant mind if I play a little?"

"No, she'll be pleased. But tell me about your concerts. They were more of a success than you allowed?"

"Yes, they were only small but they went well. I had good notices and the two critics who mattered wrote as if they understood. In the winter I shall try again on a big scale. Perhaps I shall have big successes. Perhaps I shall go to Paris and play there. You know, Susan, it is very pleasant to succeed after so much failure. And I am old enough now to succeed with humility. In these compositions of mine I am so much involved. . . . All myself is involved, and even more than myself. I understand how much of this, that people call creative work, how much one draws upon the lives of the past and perhaps too of the future. Success as an artist is no matter for personal conceit. The artist by his good fortune can reach back to where his own life and the lives of others are yet fluid. My music is an expression of something that I there find. That

it succeeds even in a worldly sense is pleasant as an additional assurance that I have found harmony, for it is nonsense to suppose that an artist does not need a public; he needs it as much as you need a world of people amongst whom your child can grow up."

While Paul was playing, Susan sat close to Maisie, who at first opened her eyes particularly wide and enquiringly but after a few moments of interested interrogation went to sleep. Before Paul had been playing for long, Martin came in. Paul gave him a quick look of recognition and went on playing. Martin went to the hearth and stood smoking, sometimes looking at Susan and her child, sometimes out over the river. As he listened, creative emotions connected with his own work seemed to flow over and around him gathering in intensity. At the end he remarked: "That's something quite new, isn't it?"

"Yes, do you like it?"

Martin nodded. "I was thinking how curiously linked up the emotion is with what I am trying to express in my work. It's as if artists in different mediums drew upon the same substance; as if the artist's work was a process of translation."

"Why limit it to the artist?" asked Paul. "Surely all life of any intensity is such an attempt at translation. If we had but perception we could al-

ways reach back to the white-hot, golden-hot matrix of life."

Martin was in a kind of dreamy contemplation. He gazed out over the river. "I suppose that is so. I had never quite realized it. But how inept most of us are, how much on the fringe of things. We are like translators who can recognize a letter here and there. The letters are everywhere; it's a matter of seeing them. I've often felt a kind of painful excitement when looking at things, a tree or a barge on the river, anything it might be, and I've felt that at any moment there might happen the sliding of some trap-door in the brain, and I would see the reality of the thing and not only the appearance; and then I've wondered whether the thing could be there at all or something universal and unearthly: a kind of naked existence blazing with joy and pain."

"It's there in people as well," said Susan, "perhaps most in people, but I find it not quite so violently as you do, Martin; something more simple, unifying. Perhaps that is because I am not a creative artist."

"It's all nonsense this talk about creation," Paul broke in. "There's no *creative* process. We artists are people who can reach back towards the life we were speaking of, and can transmit some of the vibrations that are then stirred in us. That is why

contemporary periods are moved by the same forms of expression. The human plant has its outward form and season just as other plants."

"It's more than that," said Susan, looking up excitedly. "I've made a discovery. Of course, I know it's been made a million times before, but one never knows a thing till one finds it out for oneself. This life behind appearance is peopled. We all exist there, and it is there, by living in that life, that we most truly come into contact. There affinities find each other out. We even meet people we have never seen."

Paul shook his head, smiling. "Ah, yes, Susan, these are pleasant fancies. Go a step further and we discover friendships in all periods. Why should time limit us? And a step further and we are back at the fables of men being transformed into Gods. The Gods in turn were sacrificed, burnt and resurrected, and we are back again in the old cycle."

At this moment Maisie woke up, looked surprised, indignant and hungry. She began to cry. Susan picked her up, tried to comfort her with pats and a low, inarticulate conversation, then since she was not to be comforted, offered her breast. The child cuddled close to her mother well contented.

"She is a little glutton," said Susan, "and she simply won't wait, not a minute. She's a tyrant."

Paul looked whimsically at his daughter. "Well, life, even every-day life (if there is such a thing)

seems pleasant enough at times. Susan, you are making quite a mystic of me after all my infidelities." He looked at Martin, wondering how much the young man might share his thoughts. As he looked back at Susan and her baby, an idea flashed into his mind. Why should all mankind toil and have such care in the fashioning of their outer lives? If the inner, which was the spiritual, life were in tune, the other would inevitably follow as its unalterable consequence.

CHAPTER IX

I

THERE were times when Noel could feel with the deep satisfaction of conquest that Tom was bound to her by bodily and spiritual bonds of ever increasing strength. She knew with certainty that her presence, all that made her sensitive and responsive to his moods, was being mysteriously interwoven into the fabric of his personality. She was increasingly sure that he would find life without her colourless and cold. As their bodies, so had their spirits partially united, but there were still fugitive elements. These neither her passion nor her tenderness could bring to subjection. There were times when their lives seemed ephemeral and unreal, when he seemed like some Arabian Night's adventurer, lost in the valleys of the world which her love had fashioned, who on a start remembers with wide eyes and dilated nostrils mountain peaks of snow, wind swept forests and skies etched with frozen clouds.

Her reason told her that his love for Susan and his child could not be replaced, but this did not assuage a growing and bitter jealousy. Not that she hated Susan (she sometimes hated Tom for destroy-

ing their friendship) but she wished that Susan were different. If Susan were only jealous, then by sheer strength of vitality she could tear Tom away. It was not so simple as that. Susan, she felt, kept alive in him his restive independence. Not that she suspected her lover of any spoken disloyalty.

How could she find peace in love unless there were complete unison? That question, though not often finding conscious expression, was a burning disharmony sunk deep in the sensitive material of her thought. Susan was the obstacle to unison, but what right had she to wish Susan away? It was not a question of rights, and sometimes she wondered whether Susan might not be able to understand her need.

Her disharmony and longing increased as the winter passed. She was growing restless and thin. She had asked Tom to take her away, she had pleaded that they should go to Cornwall. In that rugged, masculine country she believed she could perfectly adapt herself to the needs of her lover. But he had always refused, put her off with delays and evasions. Susan was undoubtedly the cause. It was intolerable, not to be borne. The resolution gradually grew: she would go as a suppliant and ask for Susan's generosity.

2

For some minutes Noel had walked to and fro in front of the little dark entrance-way that led to

Susan's flat. Now that she had made up her mind she felt that what she was going to ask was preposterous. Looking at the February sunshine, which was thin and yellow on the bare trees, she had a vision of summer and of a home that she and Tom might make together. She longed for the future but the present was the bridge that must lead thither. She was not lacking in courage but her heart beat uncomfortably fast as she climbed the well-known stair-way.

It was Susan who opened the door, and for a few moments the two friends stood without speaking.

"Noel, how nice of you to come and see me. I'd almost given up hope that you'd come. I wanted to come and see you, but both Tom and Paul persuaded me not to. Come in." She led Noel across the room; then, turning to her at the window, "It's one of the worst qualities of men that they invent conventional proprieties and little absurd points of honour to keep women apart; and it's one of our worst faults that we are sometimes persuaded by them."

Noel shook her head with a jerk. "Sometimes they persuade us altogether and make us live as they dictate. I've come not because I'm free, but because I believe in these conventions." She paused frowning then, looking at her friend with all the desperateness of her pain in her look, she said: "Susan, it's impossible for two women to love one

man . . . women like you and me. I don't bring . . . no, I speak only for myself. I can't bear it. He has never given you up, and never will while you are here so close to him." She paused again, but since Susan said nothing, she went on: "I know what he's like and I know there's no *reason* why he should not love both of us in different ways, as he says he can. For him that might be possible, but for me no." She looked hard at Susan and there was now a rising anger in her voice. "I am jealous of you and of him; I want him all to myself. We change each other. We are almost together but are always separated, that is because you are there."

Susan was pale. "What do you want?"

"I want you to go away out of his life completely."

Susan's hands were clenched, and, as though infected by Noel's pain and become tense by reason of it, she seemed to fling all her personality into her protest. "Oh, don't love him like that, it's too terrible."

"But I do. I don't think anything but that kind of love matters."

Susan shook her head, frowning; she trembled slightly: "No, it's not enough."

"What do you mean?"

They stood close to each other near the window, Noel flushed and Susan very pale. Susan was now perplexed, wavering before Noel's intensity. "I

find it difficult to say . . . like all things one feels deeply. Perhaps it's a defect in me, but I can't believe love is an end in itself. It's an opportunity, one perhaps among many."

"Of what?"

"Of touching life, the deep happiness of life, and so escaping the bonds and cramped restrictions of what one sometimes used to think was existence."

"What are the other opportunities?"

"Oh, I don't know. There are probably hundreds of others undiscovered. One of them seems to be a kind of reaching back into oneself, and finding life there ready to unfold."

Noel was looking across the river. She said after a pause: "I understand very well what you mean. But that's so impersonal. I can't live like that. There are things that get between. There is the inspiration of contact, that sweeps all these dreams away. "We are human beings," she said, looking back at Susan and smiling. "We need a human love to enable our souls to touch. Passion is the supreme opportunity, and passion is, by its nature, full of jealousy."

Susan was uncertain, she stepped back, away from the light of the window. "There must be different ways, but to me passion has seemed only a threshold."

Noel nodded. "But that isn't all the truth. I can't look at things from outside like that. I'm

too much involved. At their mercy, if you like. I want you to go away."

Her cry was like a cry of despair. Susan's will bent in pity before it.

"And if I go?"

"Then, I think, we can be happy. I can suit myself to what he wants. I can't endure to be just his mistress. He must find in me everything."

"But," Susan broke in, "he has a right to be in touch with his child and with me too. Though the life we lived together is ended, there is still friendship. I could be glad if he married you, but this separation seems so artificial. We have no right to parcel out his life."

"Life is not a thing of rights," said Noel. "But of necessities. We don't stand separate, we interact and mould each other. Don't think I come lightly to ask this. I know how preposterous it sounds. I couldn't have come to any one but you; I should just have tried to steal him. Susan, you *must* go away. I have tried to make him come away with me. I can't do that. When you are away he will find how much of himself belongs more and more to me."

Susan still hesitated, uncertain, and Noel, seeing her doubt, waited miserable yet resolute as though for the blow of a lash. As Susan hesitated, the feeling that each soul must be free to find its way grew with vivid intensity. Noel was in need of that freedom, and Tom? But Noel as a woman had first

claim on her sympathy. Noel was right and Susan knew now with a deep sense of pity that this was no question to be settled by any preconceived standard of morality. It was necessity. Even if it was bondage, Noel must find her own path.

"I will go," said Susan simply, then, holding out her hand; "And, Noel, do not forget that you have a friend. Give me a promise, that whatever happens you will never let your pride keep you from me."

"Ah, my pride!" said Noel, shaking her head to keep away her tears. Then giving up the attempt, she said, half-smiling, half-crying. "I was right when I told Tom that I loved you more than I loved him." The two friends kissed and Noel added, "that is perhaps why I can do without you."

3

Paul and Martin were in Zalesky's rooms lunching together when Susan's letter arrived. "Why does she write, I wonder," Paul exclaimed. He read the letter slowly, and Martin, who suddenly felt very anxious, waited in suspense. After looking at the letter for what seemed to Martin an intolerable long time, Paul looked up. "Women are always a surprise for us. Listen to this, and there is a message for you. 'I want you to hurry on your visit to Paris, to go at once if you can. I have decided to

come with you, and of course, shall bring Maisie. I can be ready to leave by tomorrow evening if you can manage this. Now that I've made up my mind, the sooner we go the better. I don't want you to mention this to Tom, but should like to say good-bye to Martin. Noel has just left me. You will let me know at once.' And that is all," said Paul.

Martin, who felt a bewildering pain at his heart at the thought of this sudden separation, jerked out his interrogations: "But what does it mean? But why? Why going to Paris so suddenly?"

Paul shrugged his shoulders, then after a few moments' silence: "Noel must have asked her to go. I can understand that. I can understand that very well. Yet it is strange. Poor Noel!"

"But why?" Martin reiterated.

"I suppose she feels that Tom is too much divided. It is difficult for two women to love one man."

"Oh, what a fool Tom is! Two such wonderful women."

"I think Noel is right," said Paul after a pause. "With a free hand she is woman enough to capture Tom. But Susan? Susan is interesting."

Martin was following a different line of thought. "You can't go as soon as that," he said, clutching at a hope.

"It will be a rush. Still I have no more engagements here. I do not like, when she asks in that

tone, to fail. Supposing now she has said to Noel: 'I will go.' It is like her to go at once."

"Will she leave her husband altogether?"

Paul nodded. "I think so." Then looking hard at Martin. "It is very wonderful how women can sometimes love one another — how they hold together. Where there is no passion, love can find strange freedom. It makes me envious. But, I cannot tell," he added with a shrug and a touch of irony, "how much pity there may be in this." Then shaking his head as if to shake away all speculation, he jumped up. "No matter, what Susan says that I will do. It will be a rush, but possible. Go round to her and tell her that I will be ready. I will call for her at nine tomorrow evening. We can catch the ten o'clock train from Victoria. I can manage it. Tell her I will come round before, if I can find time, but she must not expect me, I have so much to do."

He noticed Martin's perturbed white face. "Ah, you will miss her. Go round and talk to her, she will explain everything. Now I must go out. Come in tomorrow any time . . . I shall see you again."

Before Martin had gone far on his way to Susan's flat, he came to a standstill and remained deep in thought. He discovered a strong dislike of his errand. He rebelled against this tame leavetaking. Was he to say good-bye without any protest? Had

he a right to protest? Was he to be always good and obedient like a child or . . . what possibilities might there not be? Possibilities seemed to spring out of dim clouds of unexplored emotion, and hover half-formed and evasive, terribly exciting. He turned and walked quickly to the nearest post-office. He wrote out a telegram and put Paul's signature! "Be ready to start with me tomorrow will call for you at nine P. M." He thought bitterly that it was worse than signing his own warrant of death, yet he was relieved. The delivery of the message was an obligation to Paul; perhaps the last obligation which he, as an obedient child, would perform. Now he was free to act, if need be, for himself.

When he left the office, he walked quickly, oblivious of where he was going. His mind was in a process of sudden expansion. His heart already beat tumultuously at the thought that he might be Susan's lover. Then his humility and his child-like worship would relax his sudden tension, leaving him with an aching tenderness, half hope, half despair.

The night found him still walking in perplexity, though the hope which springs to life with maturity and manhood had burst through the chrysalis in which, for so long, it had been lying unsuspected. Like a limp, tender moth, with crumpled wings, it now swayed jeopordously clutching at its support, staggering for foothold. Throughout the night,

Martin paced restlessly to and fro in his room. Sometimes he would pause, and in these pauses he knew that hope was growing. The wings expanded slowly. Currents of blood paced slowly yet deliciously through the veins and nerves. By the morning the wings were complete though exhausted by their quick growth, unready for flight. Martin was tired out. But why had he discovered so late? All was clear to him now. Why had he been so unready, and time so short? He lay there thinking, and, as he thought, fear grew in the shadow of this thought. He divined Susan's antagonism, he was not confident that he could match her resistance. He would rest for an hour, and then when it was late enough — after breakfast — he would meet her, then for the conflict. His knowledge of her warned him of a desperate struggle. Yet hope was fully emerged, and while he felt the growing strength of its wings, he fell asleep.

Martin slept late into the afternoon. He woke with a start, horrified at the passage of time. Half past five! How many hours wasted. But there was still time. He was refreshed and felt a new man, yet, for a moment, felt a pang of ingratitude toward life that he should return to its tumultuous conflict from the peace of oblivion. With the passage of the first moments of returning consciousness his purpose became mature. He was ready for any hazard. He plunged his face in cold water. He

could now feel glad that he had slept for so long. He was almost confident.

In the early twilight he set out hopefully towards the embankment, but as he approached his destination his confidence changed to a desperate, painful resolution.

By the time he reached the dark passage-way and the door, his emotion was burning at white heat, and Susan knew in a flash as he entered the room that he had come on the first strength of his awakening manhood, and that the crystal world, in which they had smiled and exchanged greetings, was shattered. She could have called out to him: "Oh, Martin, what a pity," but the new dignity of his purpose compelled her to meet the growing man in him rather than lament the broken beauty of his adolescence.

"I have not come to say good-bye," he said, white and tense.

Susan was silent.

"All this year and longer, ever since I first saw you, I have loved you. Before I didn't know it. I have now discovered. I know it very well now. I love you so that every part of me finds its significance in the thought and sight of you. All my work is just a reflection of the beauty I discover in you. There is nothing, nothing in me that lives without you. I have grown close to you without knowing it, and now I find that you are me — everything in me that has significance, that hopes to live."

Susan was pale, terribly distressed. "Oh, Martin, I can't."

The words went through him slashing cruelly at hope's young, vibrating wings. This was what the secret fear that had grown side by side with his hope had whispered. Here was the conflict he had divined.

"Why not?"

"I don't love you — not like that."

"But you love me."

"Yes, very much."

"Isn't that enough?" Then thinking that he understood her, "Passion counts for little. It is unimportant compared with the rest. I want only what you can give. I want friendship which is greater than love."

Susan made the slightest gesture of negation. "No, Martin, that's what you think, but it's not true. You must wait and find everything in somebody else. I'm too old for you."

"Too old!" His voice showed his indignant incredulity. "There is nobody else and never will be, never."

"I could never want to be your mate," she said with steadfast deliberation, "not as you would wish. You must find your own life now, and when you have found it, then we can meet as friends." Then seeing the lividness of his pain, she said: "Remember I love you in my way very much all the time."

I love you for all we have shared, for all the beauty you have given me, for what you are, and what you will be. But, Martin, you must find your own way."

He was baffled, but hope was not dead, it still beat broken wings.

"Without you there is nothing left," he said. "With you are all the riches of life; away from you it is sheer emptiness. You say you are too old for me, but my youthfulness can be remedied. You will teach me how to grow up. The world away from you is empty. Now that I see what you are, to be separated is like being separated from my own heart, my own life. There is nothing left but pain."

"Martin, don't appeal to my pity," she said quickly, then added gently: "Cannot you learn to love me in my way? I cannot love you in yours. Remember that love can be calm and all-embracing. For our love to grow, you must find yourself in what seems that emptiness. It's not really empty." She smiled and paused. "If I were less sure of myself, I could give way out of pity and stupidity; but I care for you too much, and for myself."

Martin was silent. He smiled rather wanly. That secret fear of his might not it be leading to an entrance way that would perhaps open upon a world of imagination? Was it a weakness to find a kind of desperate pleasure in being swayed even against himself by this dear woman whom he loved? Her strength was greater than his. Why should he wish

to make tragic and harsh what she by her touch could make calm, and could even clothe in new hope? But no, if she suffered as he now suffered, her calm would be impossible. He rebelled against her persuasion. "I don't understand you," he said. "My love is more simple. I know it is wrong to be separated from you now when I have just discovered what you mean."

"It was there all the time, and so will remain that beauty that you think is mine alone. You will not cease to see it."

"It will be darkness."

As Susan saw his despondency, she was overcome with pity and longed to comfort him. She knew that if she softened it would be an additional cruelty. She could give no comfort. He must find out for himself.

Martin looked up and saw her face made momentarily ugly by the struggle of her emotion. Out of that ugliness there shot at him a flash of beauty so piercing that his life seemed to stop dead, transpierced and held motionless. Never before had he seen her like that. Never loved her till that instant, nor known the beauty of her soul. The conscious turbulence of his suffering became suddenly numb; his will and all his personal desire were left drifting and forgotten. The artist lived in a blaze of triumph knowing that for an instant the last veil had been lifted.

Susan, quick to perceive the change in him, smiled: "Do you see what I mean?" she said. "I am glad now that I am going away. I believe and hope that we shall meet again, but remember that, however separated from Tom I may be, I could never wish to be your wife. I don't want to be anybody's wife."

Martin met the earnest intent of her eyes steadily.

"Now will you help me? I'm ever so late. I've got boxes to do up and things not packed yet. Paul will be here at eight for a scratch supper. He came round this morning. He had a tremendous rush to get off. You must stay and have supper with us of course."

"And may I write to you?"

Susan hesitated: "If you can remember all that I said."

Martin was surprised to find that he could be almost cheerful in helping her departure. His own will was for the time being in abeyance. He was moving in a kind of dream.

When Paul arrived they had supper amidst the disorder of departure. Seeing how much was being left behind, Martin asked:

"But what will happen to all your things?"

"I don't want many things," she answered, smiling. "Will you take them? Tom will not want to live here again. I should like you to have this place. It's very nice. And, Martin, there's one thing you can do for me. I am sorry to leave poor old Mad

Henry. He will miss me. Perhaps you could have him here and be kind to him."

Martin had an impulse to smile ironically, but he merely nodded. "Yes, I expect he'll miss you." Then he asked, "What are you doing with my pictures?"

"I am taking them with me. One day you must come and claim them. But by that time you will have done better ones."

When the moment of departure came, Martin was still numb and bewildered. He was like some creature who, in the midst of a fierce convulsion of life's energy, gently, very gently, as almost with a kiss, had been given an anaesthetic. This is perhaps life's way of wounding most deeply the subjects of her vivisection. He knew that he was numb, and that later he would have to probe to the quick the depth of his injury.

And when she had driven away and he was left alone upon the embankment, and the power of the anaesthetic rapidly weakened, he questioned between the throbs of his returning pain. Was life always to be divided against itself? The restless delight which the heart clings to, the calm serenity which the soul embraces,—Was it impossible to unite them?

THE END

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